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**Johannes Arens**

## **Bound to Shame: Sexual Addiction and Christian Ethics**

### **Abstract**

This thesis is an attempt to add understanding and meaning to the concept of sexual addiction by correlating the clinical observation that sex addicts in particular, and shame-bound people in general, behave in cycles of control and release to the types of the two sons in the Lukan parable of the prodigal. This parable may be understood as shedding light on the equal dangers of patterns of control and release. Additionally, sex addiction is viewed from an Augustinian perspective of sin.

It is argued that human vulnerability to shaming is a result of original sin and that sexual addiction can be understood within this framework as one possible reaction to shame damage. It is suggested that at the heart of the Christian gospel is a severe warning that to attempt to hide and deny a distorted and painful perception of oneself presents a particularly deadly spiritual condition.

To view sex addicts as shame-bound people poses the question as to whether the church faithfully participates in the continuing mission of the triune God and how far its ministry helps towards the healing of shame. On the other hand, we need to explore whether the church adds to the shaming of individuals and groups, is unaware of the dynamics of shame, or even exploits those affected by this.

In the context of the current discourse within the Christian church about human sexuality, and in view of recent scandals of sexual abuse, the question of ministry towards those whose sexuality is wounded is of particular concern.

# **Bound to Shame:**

## **Sexual Addiction and Christian Ethics**

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**Doctor of Theology and Ministry**

**Department of Theology and Religious Studies**

**Durham University 2011**

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## **Prefatory Note**

As approximately 70% of sex addicts are male, I shall choose the male form if sexually exclusive language is difficult to avoid.

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**Declaration**

Some material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for the same degree in this institution. However, it has been updated and edited. Nothing of this has been published before or marked for a different degree.

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## 1 Introduction

The starting point for this exercise is the experience that many addicts reach sobriety and happiness through spirituality. However, most of them, when exploring organised religion, have received moralistic answers or encountered people they experienced as unhelpful and damaging.

In contrast, Jesus' ministry was most prominent for its outreach and success among the marginalised, the outcast and the sinners. If our churches prove unhelpful and unattractive to those who fall into these categories, this raises the question of whether we are faithful followers of Jesus and builders of his kingdom – and if we are not, why are we not?

Through the last few years sexual addiction has become an increasingly prominent and recognised condition, mostly through a number of self-identified celebrities and through a large number of high-profile sexual scandals. Though the condition is still often criticised as an excuse for adultery and improper sexual behaviour, it is becoming more accepted in wider circles of society that a fairly large number of people experience impaired control over their sexual behaviour and act contrary to their own moral standards. The current situation has many parallels with the situation of alcoholics in the first half of the 20th century. Then the “moral model” of viewing alcoholism slowly lost recognition among medical practitioners and society as a whole through increasing knowledge about the condition and the increasing prominence of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is a positive development which has far-reaching ministerial implications: if sexual behaviour for many people is not simply a matter of choice and of voluntary

adherence to moral standards, what does that say about how the church should respond to people's sexuality? The simple language of moral condemnation is clearly inadequate. On the other hand, this is not simply a matter of changing moral standards or of the revision of ideal sexual behaviour. Simply taking a more liberal approach to what is an acceptable expression of one's sexuality is not going to help those who suffer from impaired control over their behaviour. What is needed is a different approach: how to make theological sense of sexual addiction and to offer more honest ways of dealing with God's gift of sexuality.

At present the institutional approach of all churches towards sexuality seems to be dominated by fear: both through recent scandals which highlighted the extreme vulnerability of clergy to sexual misconduct and institutional problems of enabling such misconduct and through the heated controversy (at least within Anglicanism) over whether homosexual relationships are acceptable for Christians. Both those issues caused enormous distress and distrust within the church; both issues have increased the level of fear in the church's dealing with sexuality. Not least, although sexuality seems to be at the forefront of theological discussion, this discourse is riddled with all sorts of political and historical issues which make a meaningful theological discourse about human sexuality not only extremely biased but also next to impossible. The advantage of theological writing about sexual addiction is precisely the avoidance of most of the political issues connected to discourse about sexuality. Hopefully, a different perspective might offer some fresh insights.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Theological Method

Addiction is a secular concept, therefore there is no direct way of connecting it to theological concepts. There is no direct biblical account of sexual addiction, the authoritative texts of Christianity and the theological explorations of the past do not deal directly with sexual addiction – the phrase has only been used since the early 1980s.

However, this does not mean that theology has to keep silent about the profound experience of sexual addiction. Chris Cook, following Alistair McFadyen, has attempted to show that Christian theology, specifically the doctrine of sin, holds 'explanatory and descriptive power'<sup>1</sup> in relation to alcoholism, and that this phenomenon cannot be adequately understood without 'reference to the denial and opposition to God which characterises sin.'<sup>2</sup> The same approach can be attempted in the case of sexual addiction.

If the authoritative texts of Christianity are considered to be divinely inspired, breathing God's Spirit, it follows that they offer meaning beyond the cultural context in which they were originally written. Although the secular and modern concept of sexual addiction would have been alien to the human authors of the Bible, their divine inspiration guarantees that these texts can offer meaning to

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<sup>1</sup> McFadyen, Alistair I., *Bound to Sin : Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>2</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 54.; cf. Cook, Christopher C. H., *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 128.

human experiences transcending their historical and cultural bias. 'Texts of scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian traditions, we affirm that scripture has multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole drama.'<sup>3</sup> It is therefore legitimate to use biblical texts for reasons of resonance, analogy and mutual critique with a secular theme outside their original context.<sup>4</sup>

Theology has produced a very large amount of literature about human sexuality and the failure of human beings to live in identity with God's will and their own reason and will. There are obvious similarities between the secular concept of sexual addiction and the theological concept of sin, specifically sexual sin. The methodology appropriate to theological speaking of sexual addiction is therefore correlation, 'speaking of God in public'.<sup>5</sup>

This methodology stresses the importance of engagement between theology and contemporary culture. In the first paragraph of his *Systematic Theology* Tillich states that 'a theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation.'<sup>6</sup> However, this methodology has an inherent problem concerning questions of theological authority. Within all correlative theology the question remains whether 'the gospel stands in judgement over all other insights

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<sup>3</sup> Ford, David F., *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83.

<sup>4</sup> For a typology of engagement with the Bible and Christian tradition see Walton, Roger, 'Using the Bible and Christian Tradition in Theological Reflection,' *British Journal of Theological Education* 13, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> Graham, Elaine L. et al., *Theological Reflections : Methods* (London: SCM, 2005), 138.

<sup>6</sup> Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3.

into the human condition [...], or does the Christian tradition in itself require correction and revision?'<sup>7</sup>

A way forward may be offered by the work of Karl Rahner and those who followed in his steps. The relationship between theology of revelation and transcendental philosophy is for Rahner part of the relationship between nature and grace. In his view it is impossible to distinguish completely between philosophy and theology since nature and grace are ontologically connected: there is no human act which is not influenced by grace; grace is not only something additional, but an anthropological constitutive.<sup>8</sup> Rahner distinguishes two kinds of revelation: universal-transcendental revelation (which refers to the experience of God that could happen anywhere and for everyone) and special-categorical revelation (which is an expression of the former within special and categorical ways, which culminates in the revelation of Jesus Christ). Possibly the term 'secular' is in need of theological deconstruction, as there is no strict gulf between different forms of human knowing, or between different modes of divine revelation. However, the difficulty in practice remains: if secular experience and theological tradition come to different conclusions, the question of authority remains unresolved. However, as different sources of human knowledge are interconnected, it is legitimate to correlate biblical texts and Christian tradition with human experience. A mutual critique between biblical texts, Christian tradition and human experience is possible precisely because all human knowledge is by definition provisional and inspired as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Graham et al., *Theological Reflections : Methods*, 138.

<sup>8</sup> Rahner, Karl, *Grundkurs des Glaubens : Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, 11. ed. (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2005), 29-36.



In the area of human sexuality matters get more complicated because Christian tradition is far from univocal. In the Christian Bible one discovers 'not so much a series of norms about sex, as a series of asides and a larger silence'.<sup>9</sup> Voices from mainstream theology and from the fringe of Christian tradition show a plurality of theological opinions about sin and sexuality.

The problem of critical correlation touches one of the fundamental truths of Christianity: pluralism and contradictory statements are an intrinsic part of divinely inspired texts and theological tradition. Since God is greater than human understanding, he has to remain beyond the grasp of human theology. Human speaking about God can always only be approximation and practical theology is bound to come to divergent and contradictory conclusions.

This does not render the proposed theological exercise in correlation worthless, but I am aware of its limitations. The conclusions of this dissertation are necessarily biased and other people with different experiences and different theological backgrounds may come to different conclusions.

## **2.2 Limits of the Study**

For a number of reasons I am not going to undertake any further qualitative or quantitative research in the area. A considerable amount of such work has been performed already, particularly in the United States and Canada. To do any further research of this kind in the UK would for a number of reasons be extraordinarily difficult:

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<sup>9</sup> Jordan, Mark D., *Ethics of Sex* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 44.

- Access to sex addicts is particularly difficult. Considering their extreme vulnerability to exposure, they tend to be highly secretive about their condition and often live double lives.
- Sex addicts in recovery are not really organised except for three 12-step fellowships active in the UK (Sex Addicts Anonymous, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous) who see the anonymity of their members as their basic tradition. Access to their meetings is usually only for people affected by the condition and often by invitation only.
- There are only two residential clinics in the UK dealing with the issue of sexual addiction.
- Only a very small number of therapists are specialised in this area.
- Any research with people who face such extreme vulnerability to exposure has severe ethical implications.

Recognising the amount of research already undertaken and taking into account the difficulties connected with this kind of research, I will refrain from pursuing any further qualitative or quantitative research within the boundaries of this study; instead, the existing research will be taken into account and connected with theological literature. Thus the research involved will not raise questions about the ethics of subject participation, but it will address ethical questions associated with sexual addiction.

This study will explore how the theology of sin in combination with a biblical passage can throw light on sexual addiction, focussing on the recent discovery that addiction often goes in hand with deprivation behaviour and works in oscillating

patterns of control and release. However, in doing so it will require a broader look at theological speaking about sexuality and sin.

One of the dangers of any correlative approach is *eisegesis*. To start methodologically with a biblical *exegesis* and then to follow this interpretation with the exploration of sexual addiction would give the impression of greater objectivity, however, it is more honest to state the starting point for the biblical exploration as looking for biblical corroboration of a particular understanding of addiction. *Exegesis* is always *eisegesis* to some extent: 'biblical scholars come to the text with just as many interpretative strategies and expectations as anyone else,' and 'integrity consists not of having no presuppositions but of being aware of what one's own presuppositions are and of the obligation to listen to and interact with those who have different ones.'<sup>10</sup>

## 2.3 Methodological Approach

### 2.3.1 Theological Tradition

The two theological perspectives used by Cook to engage with the phenomenon of alcohol addiction are those of St Paul and St Augustine of Hippo.<sup>11</sup> I will broaden this methodological approach slightly in two directions:

The voice of St Augustine from the Christian tradition is impossible to ignore and needs to be taken into account in any Christian discussion of sin and free will. In addition to this, Thomas Aquinas offers a theology of sin, which postulates that

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, N. T., *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 130-31.

every sin has an opposite sin, which is clearly distinct from the related virtue. His concept of the mean of virtues potentially offers a way of relating healthy sexuality to sexual addiction and sexual anorexia harmonious with the current state of research on addiction.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3.2 Biblical Engagement

As part of this study I will explore the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). The parable of the prodigal son portrays three people, two of which following the exegesis of Henri Nouwen are in need of recovery, healing and grace. 'The parable [...] might well be called "The Parable of the Lost Sons." Not only did the younger son, who left home to look for freedom and happiness in a distant country, get lost, but the one who stayed home also became a lost man.'<sup>13</sup>

Whereas the younger son demands his inheritance in order to 'squander his wealth in wild living', the older son remains at home, judgemental and suspicious of his brother's behaviour and of his father's generosity. The parable is strikingly analogous to the patterns of control and release found in addiction and using this parable as a tool for understanding sexual addiction offers the opportunity of relating biblical imagery and secular science. Simply speaking, following the study of Henri Nouwen, the younger son can be seen as the addict acting out, the older son is the addict stuck in the control part of the cycle (commonly referred to as "acting in") and both have the hope of recovery: to realise who they really are. This

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<sup>12</sup> cf. Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 133.

<sup>13</sup> Nouwen, Henri J. M., *The Return of the Prodigal Son : a Story of Homecoming* (London: Darton, 1992), 69.

aspect of the parable is distinct from most of the secular discussion of sexual addiction, most of which does not deal with recovery beyond sobriety: it offers the opportunity to explore what recovery can look like and the opportunity to understand more fully the connection between sexuality, spirituality and recovery.

### **2.3.3 Ministerial Outcomes**

Swinton and Mowat define Practical Theology as ‘critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.’<sup>14</sup> The fundamentally missiological nature of Practical Theology requires the exploration of whether the current practice of the church towards those whose sexuality is wounded is faithful to God’s mission. The final section of this study will attempt to reach some provisional conclusions.

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<sup>14</sup> Swinton, John and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 25.

### 3 Addiction

#### 3.1 Conceptual, Definitional and Diagnostic Concerns

In academic discourse the term addiction is not used very much any more, since it tends to mean different things to different people. The definition of addiction in general has changed considerably in recent years, constantly widening earlier definitions, which required a specific substance to be addicted to or solely stressed the element of choice.<sup>15</sup> One possible definition suggested by Robert West is a good starting point: ‘impaired control over a reward-seeking behaviour from which harm ensues.’<sup>16</sup> This is a reasonably modern definition that no longer requires a specific substance intake (like alcohol) to be addicted to, nor does it restrict addiction to excessive appetitive behaviours<sup>17</sup> in the sense that the addict requires more of a substance – the reward-seeking behaviour can be one of deprivation (e.g. food starvation). In many cases excessive appetites and deprivation interact – this will be discussed in more detail below.

Addiction is a social construct rather than something uniquely defined. Its diagnosis has to be descriptive rather than explanatory: it can only be assigned to a set of symptoms. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive overview over the history of the definition of addiction and for a broad emerging theory of addiction see West, Robert and Ainsley Hardy, *Theory of Addiction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Jim Orford defines addiction as ‘excessive appetitive behaviours’ precisely in the sense that those appetites may include deprivation. Orford, Jim, *Excessive Appetites : a Psychological View of Addictions* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1985).

IV)<sup>18</sup> lists seven criteria of substance dependence or addiction, three of which must be met in order to apply the diagnosis:

1. The person has developed a tolerance, or a 'need for greatly increased amounts of the substance to achieve intoxication.'<sup>19</sup>
2. The person manifests withdrawal symptoms when deprived of the substance in order to relieve or avoid such symptoms.
3. The substance is taken in larger amounts or longer periods than intended.
4. Efforts to stop or reduce use have repeatedly failed.
5. A great deal of time is spent in activities associated with use of the substance.
6. Important activities are given up or reduced.
7. Use of the substance is continued despite knowledge of detrimental effects.

The criteria named in DSM-IV are controversial, as they only refer to substance abuse and exclude behavioural addictions like compulsive gambling or sexual addiction. The criteria are also subject to controversy individually; for example the existence or absence of physical withdrawal symptoms are not seen as decisive by a number of writers as some of the most addictive and dangerous substances do not cause severe symptoms upon withdrawal.<sup>20</sup> Crack cocaine and methamphetamine are both highly addicting; cessation of their use causes very limited withdrawal symptoms, nowhere near the physical symptoms caused by the withdrawal of heroin or alcohol. What seems to be the essence of addiction is the

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<sup>18</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-IV*, 4. ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-IV*, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Leshner, Alan I., 'Addiction is a Brain Disease, and it Matters,' *Science* 278, no. 5335 (1997), 46.

criterion mentioned last in DSM-IV: whether somebody engages in a behaviour (e.g. drug taking) in the face of negative consequences.

The outcome of addiction involves biological, psychological and social harm. Most addictions have potentially lethal consequences, either directly related to the behaviour (for example liver cirrhosis following alcohol abuse) or indirectly (for example suicide). Equally, treatment involves biological, psychological and social processes and always requires some form of abstinence.

## **3.2 Aetiology of Addiction**

Aetiological theories can be classified in the following way:

- a) neurobiological abnormalities preceding addictive behaviour
- b) factors in the social or physical environment of the individual.<sup>21</sup>

### **3.2.1 Neurobiological Abnormalities preceding Addictive Behaviour**

#### **3.2.1.1 Genetic Disposition**

Individual factors influencing a vulnerability to addiction have attracted a considerable body of research, particularly addressing the question whether a predisposition to addiction may be inherited. There have been a number of twin studies and adoption studies, particularly in connection with alcoholism.<sup>22</sup> These studies show that a genetic predisposition to addictive behaviours is likely.

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<sup>21</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 175.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of various studies about aetiology of alcoholism see Cook, Christopher C. H., 'Aetiology of Alcohol Misuse,' in *Seminars in Alcohol and Drug Misuse*, ed. Royal College of Psychiatrists, et al., *Seminars in Psychiatry* (London: Gaskell, 1994).



However, some studies have shown that adopted children have a lower rate of alcoholism than their biological siblings who were raised by their birth parents, showing that the adoptive environment had a positive effect, not eliminating the biological risk but nevertheless reducing it.<sup>23</sup> There is evidence of genetic effect, but it is not clear exactly in what way and how far different aspects of the motivational system are genetically influenced. For example, a hereditary vulnerability to alcoholism may lead to addiction, but this is only a statistical probability, not a determined outcome.

#### **3.2.1.2 Biological Factors**

Another area that attracts huge research interest and is connected to genetic predispositions is how these inherent vulnerabilities are mediated biologically. At least in some cases of addictive behaviour, biological factors are responsible for a vulnerability to the development of addiction – this could for example be an endocrinologic pathology or a brain pathology.

This is a vast field of study and considerable progress has been made in a number of areas, particularly in understanding how the neurochemistry of the brain is affected by drug taking or by engaging in certain behaviours. Scientists have identified neural circuits that subsume the actions of every known drug of abuse and have likewise specified common pathways that are affected by all drugs and by certain behaviours.<sup>24</sup> Addiction involves the maladaptive re-direction of basic biological drives to serve the initiation and maintenance of an addiction,

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<sup>23</sup> Gwinnell, Esther and Christine A. Adamec, *The A to Z of Addictions and Addictive Behaviors* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2006), 133.

<sup>24</sup> Leshner, 'Addiction is a Brain Disease,' 45.

particularly the human exploratory drive. Addictions subvert existing neural circuits that have evolved to process information about natural drives and their reinforcers. It seems to be the case that drugs and addictive behaviours tap into the existing reward system of the brain, making use of their similarity to endogenous substances. There is clear similarity between opiates and substances the brain produces itself – drugs work because they “highjack” existing circuits. A key role seems to be played by the mesolimbic reward system, particularly by the dopamine cascade involving neurons in the nucleus accumbens (NAc). For the purpose of this study it is sufficient to say that, in spite of dramatic progress in the past twenty years, the picture of what happens biologically in the area of addiction is still patchy - though increasingly complex. Activation of the mesolimbic reward system is a common feature of various drugs and behaviours in spite of their different appearance. ‘The common brain effects of addicting substances suggest common brain mechanisms underlying all addictions.’<sup>25</sup>

### **3.2.1.3 Psychological Factors**

There is a plethora of psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural theories about the aetiology of addiction. There is evidence that addiction develops often in combination with or as a result of psychiatric disorders<sup>26</sup> or in connection with specific personality traits like “high novelty seeking”. There are various models taking into account the learning theories of classical and operant conditioning.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Leshner, 'Addiction is a Brain Disease,' 46.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, 'Aetiology of Alcohol Misuse,' 112.

<sup>27</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 75-109.

### 3.2.2 Factors in the Social or Physical Environment of the Individual

Development of addiction is influenced by the environment of the individual. Quite simply, its existence depends on the availability of a drug – one cannot be addicted to smoking without the availability of tobacco products. Social pressure to smoke increases the number of people smoking; the financial cost of alcohol influences its consumption levels.<sup>28</sup>

Once an addiction is established it gains a dynamic of its own and does not disappear if an underlying pathology is cured. Soldiers who became addicted to heroin whilst serving in Vietnam did not stop using when they returned to the United States – their addiction was established and continued. There is growing evidence that drug use modifies brain function in critical ways, not only acutely: prolonged use causes pervasive changes in the functioning of the brain which continue long after the drug taking has been stopped. 'Significant effects of chronic use have been identified for many drugs at all levels: molecular, cellular, structural, and functional.'<sup>29</sup> However, the many cases of heroin addiction with Vietnam veterans showed that addiction is not *only* a brain disease: their addiction was comparatively easy to treat as it had developed in a totally different social context to the one to which they had returned.<sup>30</sup> These cases prove that the social context of an addiction is critically important.

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<sup>28</sup> cf. Babor, Thomas, *Alcohol : No Ordinary Commodity : Research and Public Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Edwards, Griffith, *Alcohol Policy and the Public Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Orford, *Excessive Appetites*, 185-200.

<sup>29</sup> Leshner, 'Addiction is a Brain Disease,' 46.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Silcott, Karen Z. and Chad L. Cross, 'Veterans, Substance and Treatment,' in *Encyclopedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery*, ed. Gary L. Fisher and Nancy A. Roget (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009).

As will be discussed in greater detail below, a particular psychological theory seems to be increasingly accepted for sex addiction: that it is a form of self-medication which may develop in response to some form of narcissistic damage or trauma which has specific aspects that make a sexually addictive response likely.

### 3.3 Synthetic Theories of Addiction

Authors like Orford,<sup>31</sup> Goodman<sup>32</sup> and West<sup>33</sup> reviewed a large number of theories of addiction and developed synthetic theories which take into account the fact that addiction is better described as a collective noun, like alcohol dependence syndrome, that itself describes a collection of signs and symptoms that seem to occur consistently together. It is obvious that choice plays a role in any addiction; 'there are few addiction experts who believe that an addict would on a given occasion partake of their addiction in the certain knowledge that it would kill them immediately'<sup>34</sup>, but choice theories fail to take into account, among other things, that addiction develops or that certain activities have a higher addictive potential than others (e.g. a much higher proportion of people who ever injected heroin are addicted than those who ever used caffeine).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Orford, *Excessive Appetites*.

<sup>32</sup> Goodman, Aviel, 'Sexual Addiction: Designation and Treatment,' *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 18 (1992); Goodman, Aviel, 'Diagnosis and Treatment of Sexual Addiction,' *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 19, no. 3 (1993); Goodman, Aviel, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach* (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*.

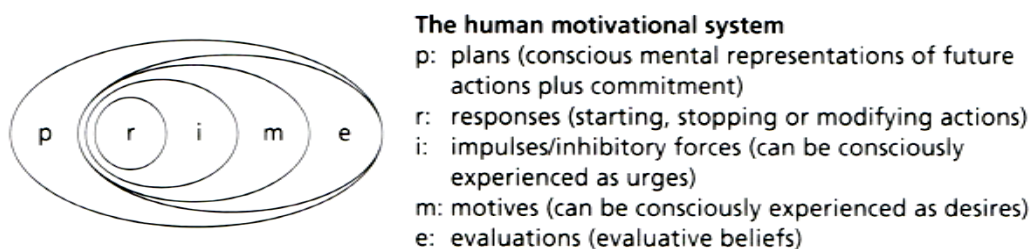
<sup>34</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> cf. West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 27.

The authors of synthetic theories demonstrate that addiction affects the choices we make but cannot be understood solely in terms of those choices; it affects our needs and desires but cannot be understood solely in terms of those; it affects our emotional attachment to the object of the addiction but involves more than this; it involves our sense of identity but cannot be understood solely in terms of this; it can involve non-conscious impulses as well as conscious urges but cannot be understood solely as a disorder of impulse control; it often involves a habitual element but is more than just habit.

West's starting point for his own theory of addiction is a synthetic theory of motivation. His "p.r.i.m.e" model of motivation (see below) takes into account five levels of complexity, any of which can function abnormally if addiction is present.

**Figure 1 The human motivational system<sup>36</sup>**



These different levels of complexity interact if they are adjacent to each other in the above model. The apparent strength of this synthetic model of motivation is its ability to take into account all known aspects of human motivation, whether conscious, unconscious, hereditarily determined or learned.

This model provides the basis for West's synthetic theory of addiction, but he adds the important proposition that the human mind has evolved to be inherently

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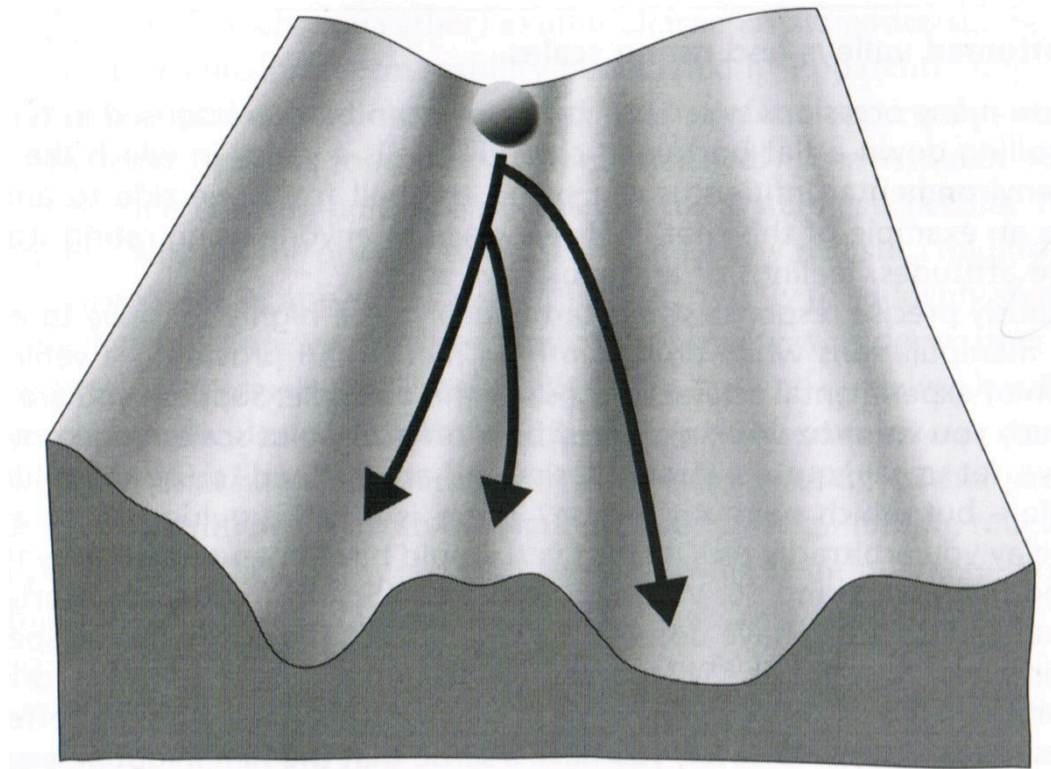
<sup>36</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 147.

unstable and that human behaviour is analogous to the mathematical modelling of chaos theory. The human mind is a homeodynamic system; like other physiological systems it is in constant flux and is steered by constant balancing input (e.g. blood pressure). This has the huge advantage of making human minds highly adaptable, creative and sensitive, but comes at the price of being in constant need of balancing input and in constant danger of going out of control.<sup>37</sup> Thus the human mind is highly susceptible to maladaptive processes and behaviour patterns. These patterns and processes involve all of the aforementioned levels of complexity in the motivational system: from simple reflexes, through impulses and inhibitory forces, then desires, drives and emotional states, to evaluations and plans. However, these maladaptive processes and patterns develop their own stability in time: West uses Waddington's 'epigenetic landscape' model as a way of visualising this.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 167.

<sup>38</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 171. Referring to Waddington, C. H., *Tools for Thought : how to Understand and Apply the Latest Scientific Techniques of Problem Solving* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

**Figure 2: Epigenetic Landscape proposed by Waddington**

The state of an organism can be compared with a ball rolling down a landscape with valleys (“chreods”) and plains. Whilst running on a plain, comparatively minor influences can cause a change of direction. Change can occur either through various forms of input or through the lack of balancing input. Addiction would represent a particular deep valley; a change of direction would require a massive and sustained input; whereas at bifurcations tiny forces are sufficient to decide whether the ball runs down one valley or the other, illustrating how minor triggers can lead to drastic changes of behaviour. In this model human behaviour (analogous to chaos theory) allows tiny events to have huge impacts and permits abrupt changes to happen in response to a complex array of inputs (e.g. the proverbial butterfly in China triggering weather changes in other parts of the world).

The definition of addiction following West's synthetic theory needs then to be slightly adapted: 'Addiction can be usefully viewed as a chronic condition of the "motivational system" in which a reward-seeking behaviour has become "out of control"'.<sup>39</sup>

The other synthetic theories mentioned do not refer to chaos theory but come to very similar conclusions about the aetiology of addiction. Orford, West and Goodman suggest that an underlying vulnerability needs to be viewed separately from the addictive behaviour.

### 3.4 Discussion

The newer synthetic theories of addiction agree - and make a convincing case - that 'theories of psychoactive substance addiction, bulimia, pathological gambling, and sexual addiction share so many features that they resemble variations on a theme rather than separate themes.'<sup>40</sup> Other authors extend this list to include behaviours like excessive sport, aggressive behaviours,<sup>41</sup> excessive religious behaviour<sup>42</sup>, various other forms of binge and deprivation behaviours<sup>43</sup> as well as behaviours

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<sup>39</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 174.

<sup>40</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 171. Referring to Goodman, Aviel, 'The Addictive Process: a Psychoanalytic Understanding,' *Journal of American Academic Psychoanalysis* 21, no. 1 (1993). West and Orford are less clear, but hint at the same conclusion.

<sup>41</sup> Orford, *Excessive Appetites*, 342.

<sup>42</sup> Birchard, Thaddeus, 'The Snake and the Seraph: Sexual Addiction and Religious Behaviour,' *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (2004); Birchard, Thaddeus, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World : Sexual and Religious Behaviour,' *The Royal College of Psychiatrists. Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group: Newsletter* 22 (2006).

<sup>43</sup> Carnes, Patrick J. and Joseph Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia : Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 1997); Carnes, Patrick J. et al., 'Bargains With Chaos: Sex Addicts and Addiction Interaction Disorder,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 12, no. 2 (2005); Huebner, Hans F.,



which regulate one's sense of self: masochism or dysfunctional spirituality.<sup>44</sup> In his book about sexual addiction Goodman<sup>45</sup> reviews biological theories in addition to psychological theories and comes to exactly the same conclusion: 'the psychological formulation of the addictive process and the neurobiological formulation of the addictive process are consistent with each other; and [...] they are moreover, to a great extent, isomorphic with each other.'<sup>46</sup> A number of other writers in the area support this claim.<sup>47</sup> This is not a resurrection of the discredited concept of the "addictive personality" – the addictive process is 'a personality feature that characterizes individuals who suffer from addictive disorders. [...] It does not in itself constitute a type of personality disorder.'<sup>48</sup>

Addiction may not only take different shapes (e.g. alcoholism or gambling) but is only one possible answer to an underlying vulnerability or predisposing, bio-psychosocial process – the addictive process. Hence addiction can be usefully viewed as a symptom of an underlying bio-psycho-social process preceding the addiction and being independent from the addictive behaviour.<sup>49</sup> As will be discussed in more detail below, the particular addictive substance or behaviour can change relatively easily. Expressed in biological terms, different substances or

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*Endorphins, Eating Disorders and other Addictive Behaviors* (New York: Norton, 1993); Lechler, Walther H., *Nicht die Droge ist's - wir sind alle süchtig*, 3. ed. (Oberursel: Zwölf & Zwölf, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Baumeister, Roy F., *Masochism and the Self* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989); Baumeister, Roy F., *Escaping the Self: Alcoholism, Spirituality, Masochism, and other Flights from the Burden of Selfhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 39-59.

<sup>46</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 219.

<sup>47</sup> e.g. Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'; Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.'; Coleman, Eli, 'Sexual Compulsivity: Definition, Etiology and Treatment,' in *Chemical Dependency and Intimacy Dysfunction* (New York: Haworth, 1988). More tentatively West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 224.

<sup>49</sup> West and Hardy, *Theory of Addiction*, 5.

behaviours can affect the brain in a similar way; in psychological terms: they can mediate one's affects or sense of self in a similar way.<sup>50</sup> Aviel Goodman summarises:

The category of addictive disorders is most accurately described, not as a collection of distinct disorders, but as an underlying pathological process that can be expressed in one or more of various behavioural manifestations. [...] The addictive process could be understood as compulsive dependence on external action as a means of regulating one's internal (or subjective) states, one's feelings and sense of self. [...] It involves compulsively depending on something outside, which the individual believes that he or she can control, as a means of dealing with problems that are within. I would now describe the addictive process as an enduring, inordinately strong tendency to engage in some form of pleasure-producing behavior as a means of relieving painful affects and/or regulating one's sense of self. [...] The addictive process is both psychological and biological and can be described and understood in either psychological or biological terms.

The newer theories of addiction are much broader than the earlier theories based on choice or conditioning only or restricting addiction to substance abuse. By splitting the addictive process from the addictive behaviour they explain why addicts often constitutionally have or develop a vulnerability that can then be expressed by addictive behaviours or possibly a range of other behaviours (e.g. self harm, aggression, depression, or compulsions).<sup>51</sup> This does not mean that addiction cannot develop without the underlying predisposition: it can arise from primarily environmental factors (e.g. a heavy drinking culture or the example of Vietnam veterans). However, in many cases the aetiology seems to be more

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<sup>50</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.'; Koob, G. F., 'Drugs of Abuse - Anatomy, Pharmacology and Function of Reward Pathways,' *Trends in Pharmacological Sciences* 13, no. 5 (1992); Koob, G. F. et al., 'Alcohol, the Reward System and Dependence,' *Toward a Molecular Basis of Alcohol Use and Abuse* 71 (1994).

<sup>51</sup> Khantzian, Edward J., 'Trauma and Addictive Suffering: Self-Medication Perspective,' in *Treating Addiction as a Human Process* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1999).

complex. In the theoretical concept favoured in this study the aetiology of addiction needs to focus on two different aspects:

- a) Why a person came to be dependant on outside stimuli for self-regulation  
i.e. why the vulnerability to addiction – the addictive process – developed in the first place,
- b) and why the addictive behaviour took the particular shape it took.

Apart from hereditary or constitutional biological factors, a number of authors propose that narcissistic damage or trauma play a key role in the development of the addictive process.<sup>52</sup> The specific shape or kind that this damage has taken seems to be decisive for the kind of addictive behaviour to which somebody is prone – the specific qualities of traumatic damage seem to determine the “drug of choice”.<sup>53</sup>

The development of a particular addictive disorder thus seems to have three components: (1) an individual is predisposed to depend on some form of pleasure-producing behavior to regulate his or her (dysregulated) affects and sense of self, by virtue of the addictive process; (2) the individual takes a mood-altering substance into his or her body, or engages in some other rewarding behavior; and (3) the effects of the substance or behavior (negatively reinforcing, positively reinforcing, and aversive), the individual's expectations about its effects in the future, and the fit between the substance or the behavior and the individual's characteristic modes of adaptation, combine to determine the likelihood that the individual will select that substance or behavior as his or her addictive “drug of choice”.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> e.g. Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'; van der Kolk, Bessel A., 'The Trauma Spectrum : The Interaction of Biological and Social Events in the Genesis of the Trauma Response,' *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 1, no. 3 (1988); Wurmser, Leon, 'Shame : the Veiled Companion of Narcissism,' in *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald L. Nathanson (New York: Guilford Press, 1987).

<sup>53</sup> see below chapter 4, cf. Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 227-29.

<sup>54</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 227.

Synthetic theories have the huge advantage of being able to integrate a large variety of genetic, biological, behavioural and social components, which all seem to be influential in the development and persistence of addiction. This comes at the price of making the picture more complicated and multifaceted. The implications for treatment are enormous, as the synthetic theories explain (among other things) why treatment and recovery need to take into account different contributing factors and why recovery is slow and difficult. Focussing on one area alone, like treating an underlying pathology (e.g. removing somebody from a war zone) or restricting access to alcohol, without dealing with issues of personality, is unlikely to stop these addictions once they are established.

If we understand addiction as a prototypical psychobiological illness, with critical biological, behavioural, and social-context components, our treatment strategies must include biological, behavioural, and social-context components.<sup>55</sup>

It is perfectly possible to include non-substance behavioural addictions within the synthetic theoretical concept. It remains difficult to find a clear boundary between what is normal or healthy and what is abnormal and pathologic.<sup>56</sup> There are cases with a clear consensus that addiction is present and others where the necessarily fuzzy boundaries make a clear diagnosis impossible.

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<sup>55</sup> Leshner, 'Addiction is a Brain Disease,' 46.

<sup>56</sup> cf. Orford, *Excessive Appetites*, 5.

## **4 Sexual Addiction**

### **4.1 Stories**

Rather than starting with the theory and looking at symptoms later on, I would like to begin with the stories of two real people I met at a conference in 2003 who gave me permission to summarise their stories and use them. I have changed names and minor details.

Tim 2003

My name is Tim and I am a sex addict. Since my early childhood I have used sex to escape unpleasant situations and feelings. When I first discovered pornography at the age of 12 I was instantly hooked. The greatest thing for me was the development of the Internet as a source for pornography. Every one of my fantasies was instantly available and I spent up to 12 hours per day (or rather night) in front of my computer. Real people do not feature prominently in my addiction - about 20 encounters in saunas, parks or with prostitutes. My main drug is pictures and movies. Not only the time I spent increased, but I searched out increasingly extreme pornography to the point of committing criminal offences. When my wife found out about what I was really doing in front of my computer, that was only the final straw for getting divorced – I had not been present in the relationship for a long time. I married again – which of course did not change anything - and finally reached my bottom line when I found myself in a porn

cinema three days after the death of our first son. I could not stand myself any more and did not want to live like that for the rest of my life.

Tim 2010

Today I am sober and have been abstinent from any sex outside my marriage including masturbation for more than 2 years. I am still married, my wife knows about my problems and there are certain things I need to do in order to stay sober. I don't use the internet without accountability software, I need 12-step- friends to help me and I really need to take care of myself physically and spiritually or within hours I could end up where I was before. My first glass is literally at arm's length and I have an enormous library of pornographic pictures in my head. After a long time of denial I now know that I cannot have any genital sex with anybody else than my wife, I cannot engage in masturbation without triggering fantasies and lust that gets me into trouble. I still want to escape when things get tough – but I know that going back does not solve anything. I am much happier today and every day I try to do less that makes me unhappy.

Ken 2003

My name is Ken and I am a sex addict. I am a Roman Catholic priest and promised to live a celibate life – this promise I kept for about 5 weeks. I have been sexual from a very early age – by now I know that my father abused me since I was 5 years old but it took me a long time to remember this.

Becoming a priest promised a way out of my sexual orientation, my sexual life style, my family, everything really. Obviously this did not work. At the height of my acting out I spent almost every night out in gay saunas, meeting points or train stations to find sex, mostly anonymous. Being single nobody asks questions if I am not at home, I decide when and how I work – thus I got away with it for many years. Finally my situation deteriorated that much that I was always tired and could not do my job properly any more. I took enormous risks in acting out – I got involved in sado-masochistic practices and looked for sex in places, which were actually dangerous. It is a miracle that I did not catch HIV and that I was never physically assaulted. In the end I was getting desperate – I accumulated debts of £200,000: spent on prostitutes, I was under police order to stay out of 5 railway stations and cracks appeared in my cover stories: numerous people in my professional surroundings had some idea what I was doing.

Ken 2010

Today I am sober. I do not talk about yesterday or tomorrow. Only today counts. I am steadily paying back my debts and I am grateful that the addiction has not killed me. I have a lot of help from friends who have been where I have been and who know my story – every shameful bit of it. I no longer live a double life – I have

told my bishop about my difficulties. I am still a priest. The amazing thing really is that although I am deeply wounded in my sexuality, a lot of people with sexual problems or marriage problems come to me in my role as a priest. They sense some form of connection. The greatest miracle is that God uses me as a source of healing for others.



## 4.2 Theory of Sex Addiction

Problematic sexual behaviours have been identified for centuries. The popular study 'Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction' by Patrick Carnes in 1983 was triggered by the rise of 12-step fellowships like Sexaholics Anonymous and Sex Addicts Anonymous in the late 1970s applying the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to their sexual behaviour.<sup>57</sup> A number of people realised that they could not properly address their sexual addiction within AA and founded meetings focussing particularly on sexual behaviour – successfully; they achieved sobriety. The subject gained increased publicity within the general population in connection with the recent child abuse scandals in a number of institutions, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church and through the admittance of some public figures to being sexually addicted (e.g. the actor David Duchovny or the golf star Tiger Woods). However, the phenomenon is not new; the following description by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* from 1886 describes a condition, in which someone's sexual appetite is

abnormally increased to such an extent that it permeates all his thoughts and feelings, allowing of no other aims in life, tumultuously, and in a rut-like fashion demanding gratification without granting the possibility of moral and righteous counter-presentations, and resolving itself into an impulsive, insatiable succession of sexual enjoyments. [...] This pathological sexuality is a dreadful scourge for its victim for he is in constant danger of violating the laws of the state and of morality, of losing his honor, his freedom and even his life.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Carnes, Patrick J., *Out of the Shadows : Understanding Sexual Addiction*, 3. ed. (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> Krafft-Ebing, Richard von, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), 46-47.

The condition of using sexuality addictively and experiencing it as out of control is probably as old as humanity. Carnes refers to the fact that Christian women visiting monks in the Syrian mountains for spiritual direction were apparently sometimes raped by them – showing that those who are sober for years can relapse into the full acting out behaviour within seconds. There is obviously a difference between sobriety and recovery.<sup>59</sup>

### 4.2.1 Categorisation and Terminology

In spite of what has been said above about addiction in general, the concept of sexual addiction remains controversial. There is controversy about terminology as well as about categorisation. The main criticism of those who do not accept sexual addiction as a “proper” addiction seems to be mainly centred around the legitimacy of expanding the definition of addiction to apply to behaviours that do not involve the use of a substance that produces increasing tolerance with repeated use and withdrawal symptoms upon cessation.<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, due to the differing and confusing terminology, information is somewhat difficult to find. Literature about this phenomenon appears under the headings of sexual addiction,<sup>61</sup> compulsivity,<sup>62</sup> impulse control<sup>63</sup>, dependence<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> cf. Carnes and Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia*, 65-67.

<sup>60</sup> Gold, Steven N. and Christopher L. Heffner, 'Sexual Addiction: Many Concepts, Minimal Data,' *Clinical Psychology Review* 18, no. 3 (1998), 370.

<sup>61</sup> Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*; Earle, R. H. and G. M. Crow, 'Sexual Addiction : Understanding and Treating the Phenomenon,' *Contemporary Family Therapy* 12, no. 2 (1990); Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*; Schwartz, Mark F., 'Sexual Addiction: An Integrated Approach,' *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 33, no. 5 (2004).

<sup>62</sup> Schwartz, Mark F., 'Sexual Compulsivity as Posttraumatic-Stress-Disorder : Treatment Perspectives,' *Psychiatric Annals* 22, no. 6 (1992).

and excessive sexual behaviour. Additionally, DSM-III-R<sup>65</sup> used the term non-paraphilic sexual addiction, an approach inconsistent with the decision not to include this term in DSM-IV.

People suffering from impaired control over sexuality have been categorised as suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder, from an impulse control disorder or from an addictive sexual disorder.<sup>66</sup> Some writers have therefore suggested the use of non-specific terms like hypersexuality,<sup>67</sup> but the term sexual addiction remains still the most widely used, probably because most writers want to stress that the behaviour is to be categorised as addictive use of sexuality. Problematically, the difference in theoretical classification has an impact on available treatment. A compulsive disorder is treated differently from an addiction and there is currently very little data about recovery rates and the success of different approaches.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from labelling, the concept of sexual addiction has been criticised from a number of different perspectives, which have been categorised and described by Goodman as conventional, scientific, sociological and moral.<sup>69</sup> The most pertinent

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<sup>63</sup> Barth, R. J. and B. N. Kinder, 'The Mislabeling of Sexual Impulsivity,' *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 13, no. 1 (1987); Quadland, M. C. and W. D. Shattls, 'AIDS, Sexuality, and Sexual Control,' *Journal of Homosexuality* 14, no. 1-2 (1987).

<sup>64</sup> Orford, *Excessive Appetites*.

<sup>65</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-III-R*, 3. ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

<sup>66</sup> Stein, D. J., 'Classifying Hypersexual Disorders : Compulsive, Impulsive, and Addictive Models,' *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 31, no. 4 (2008).

<sup>67</sup> Bancroft, J., 'Sexual Behavior that is "Out of Control": a Theoretical Conceptual Approach,' *ibid*; Bancroft, J. and Z. Vukadinovic, 'Sexual Addiction, Sexual Compulsivity, Sexual Impulsivity, or what? Toward a Theoretical Model,' *Journal of Sex Research* 41, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>68</sup> Gold and Heffner, 'Sexual Addiction,' 379.

<sup>69</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 24-36.

criticism of the concept seems to be sociological and moral, particularly where it involves politics: Levine and Trodden criticised that 'the diagnosis of sexual addiction and sexual compulsion rests on culturally induced perceptions of what constitutes sexual impulse control.'<sup>70</sup> The concept of sexual addiction does indeed get used by the religious and political right to denounce any sexual practice or orientation outside classical marriage and is particularly abused for denouncing homosexuality, which in some publications is described *per se* as a form of sexual addiction.<sup>71</sup> This is (correctly) perceived by some as a renewed attempt to medicalise the civil discourse about what constitutes acceptable sexual expression within society. Levine and Trodden therefore state that 'the invention of sexual addiction and sexual compulsion as "diseases" threatens the civil liberties of sexually variant peoples.'<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Coleman warns that 'it is dangerous to define compulsive sexual behavior simply as behavior which does not fit normative standards.'<sup>73</sup> In his view the behaviour is a 'symptom of an underlying obsessive compulsive disorder in which anxiety-driven behavior happens to be sexual in nature.'<sup>74</sup> Apart from the political questions raised by the medical classification of sexual behaviour, some authors are concerned about the necessarily fuzzy boundaries between the clinical definition of what constitutes addiction and what does not: 'Labelling sexual

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<sup>70</sup> Levine, Martin P. and Richard R. Troiden, 'The Myth of Sexual Compulsivity,' *The Journal of Sex Research* 25, no. 3 (1988), 351.

<sup>71</sup> a typical example is Schaumburg, Harry W., *False Intimacy : Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Levine and Troiden, 'The Myth of Sexual Compulsivity,' 361.

<sup>73</sup> Coleman, Eli, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?,' *Psychiatric Annals* 22, no. 6 (1992).

<sup>74</sup> Coleman, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?,' 12.

problems as addictions and defining them as disorders that can never be fully overcome seems naïve at best and self-serving at worst.<sup>75</sup> Wendy Kaminer argues similarly, rejecting the medicalisation and dramatisation of what she basically sees as bad habits – their equal ranking with “proper addictions” or with trauma survivors is seen as offensive.<sup>76</sup>

However, there is little controversy about the existence and experience of such behaviours described as sexual addiction, dependence, impulsivity or compulsion. In spite of the theoretical and conceptual disagreements, the clinical literature has been remarkably consistent in the description of these behaviours and in the consequences for those afflicted by them.

The proposals for DSM-V to be published in 2013 are now available on the internet. Hypersexual Disorder is proposed as a new sexual disorder diagnostic category, particularly due to the recognition of ‘significant clinical need’.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Symptoms

Gold and Heffner compiled the following table of behavioural and cognitive or emotional symptoms connected with sexual addiction from a number of sources:<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Fischer, B., 'Sexual Addiction Revisited,' *The Addictions Newsletter* 2, no. 3 (1995), 5.

<sup>76</sup> Kaminer, Wendy, *I'm Dysfunctional, you're Dysfunctional : the Recovery Movement and other Self-Help Fashions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> 'American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5 Development: Hypersexual Disorder', <http://www.dsm5.org/ProposedRevisions/Pages/proposedrevision.aspx?rid=415#> (26 November 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Gold and Heffner, 'Sexual Addiction.' Compiled from Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*; Coleman, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?'; Earle and Crow, 'Sexual Addiction.'; Pincu, L., 'Sexual Compulsivity in Gay Men - Controversy and Treatment,' *Journal of Counseling and Development* 68, no. 1 (1989); Schwartz, Mark F. and W.S. Brasted, 'Sexual Addiction,' *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* 19 (1985).

**Table 1 Symptomatology Associated with Sexual Addiction**

Behavioral symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent sexual encounters</li> <li>• Compulsive masturbation</li> <li>• Seeking new sexual encounters out of boredom with old ones</li> <li>• Repeated unsuccessful attempts to stop or reduce excessive or problematic sexual behaviors</li> <li>• Engaging in sexual activities without physiological arousal</li> <li>• Legal involvement resulting from sexual behavior</li> <li>• Frequent use of pornography</li> </ul>
Cognitive and emotional symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obsessive thoughts of sexuality and sexual encounters</li> <li>• Rationalization for continuation of sexual behaviors</li> <li>• Guilt resulting from excessive or problematic sexual behavior</li> <li>• Loneliness, boredom, and/or rage</li> <li>• Depression, low self-opinion</li> <li>• Shame and secrecy regarding sexual behaviors</li> <li>• Indifference to usual sexual partner</li> <li>• Lack of control in many life aspects (not directly related to sexual behavior)</li> <li>• Desire to escape from or suppress unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Preference for anonymous sex</li> <li>• Experientially disconnecting intimacy for sex</li> </ul>

Carnes tries to categorise the sexual activity connected with sexual addiction into three distinct levels, according to their violation of cultural standards:<sup>79</sup>

**Table 2 Addiction Levels**

Level of Addiction	Behaviour
Level One	Masturbation, heterosexual relationships, pornography, prostitution, and homosexuality
Level Two	Exhibitionism, voyeurism, indecent phone calls, and indecent liberties.
Level Three	Child molestation, incest, and rape.

However, these descriptions seem to be of limited value, as the diagnosis of sexual addiction does not rest on participation in particular forms of sexuality, nor does it depend on frequency or the violation of cultural standards. There are sex addicts who act out mainly in fantasy who never violate any cultural standards or never engage in any paraphilia. Carnes' different levels do not indicate a necessary path of progression.

Whether a pattern of sexual behavior qualifies as sexual addiction is determined not by the type of behavior, its object, its frequency, or its social acceptability, but by how this behavior pattern relates to and affects an individual's life.<sup>80</sup>

Following writers like Goodman,<sup>81</sup> Carnes,<sup>82</sup> Schwartz<sup>83</sup> or Birchard,<sup>84</sup> the diagnosis of sexual addiction depends on the function of the behaviour and on the consequences it entails.

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<sup>79</sup> Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 54.

<sup>80</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 34.

<sup>81</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*.

<sup>82</sup> Carnes, Patrick J., *Contrary to Love : Helping the Sexual Addict* (Minneapolis, Minn.: CompCare Publishers, 1989); Carnes, Patrick J., *Don't Call it Love : Recovery from Sexual Addiction* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991); Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*.

As with any addiction, there are numerous biological, socio-cultural and cognitive-behavioural and psychoanalytical theories, each being useful for certain aspects of addiction, compulsivity and perversion. The role of biological factors or hereditary predisposition seems to be even less clear than with other addictions such as alcoholism. The newer publications about sexual addiction mostly follow an integrative approach, agreeing that sex addiction, like substance dependence, is a heterogeneous class of disorders that develops as a reaction to an underlying pathology.<sup>85</sup>

Addictive disorders – alcoholism, drug addiction, bulimia, pathological gambling, and sexual addiction – have a common and underlying psychobiological process; and [...] this process precedes the onset of the disorders and is thus not simply a consequence of addictive behavior or an addictive life-style.<sup>86</sup>

Behavioural addictions affect the reward system of the brain in similar ways to drugs: it has long been known that behaviour without any substance intake has a neurochemical effect. The best known example to the general public is probably the so-called runner's high.<sup>87</sup> Familiar to all long-distance runners, this is a rather pleasurable state of mental peace and relative physical comfort reached after approximately one hour of running. The stress of long-distance running triggers the production of endogenous opiates in the human brain. This is a clinically

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<sup>83</sup> Schwartz, 'Sexual Addiction: An Integrated Approach.'

<sup>84</sup> Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'

<sup>85</sup> Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.'; Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*; Goodman, Aviel, 'Neurobiology of Addiction : an Integrative Review,' *Biochemical Pharmacology* 75, no. 1 (2008); Schwartz, 'Sexual Addiction: An Integrated Approach.'

<sup>86</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 144.

<sup>87</sup> Boecker, H. et al., 'The Runner's High: Opioidergic Mechanisms in the Human Brain,' *Cerebral Cortex* 18, no. 11 (2008).



researched example giving evidence that behaviours and substances alike can access this neurobiological reward system. Evolutionarily, this system would not exist if it served no function other than being accessible only through exogenously introduced substances. Gold and Heffner agree that

the addiction is to the neurochemical effect of the behavior involved (whether it be ingestion of alcohol or engaging in sexual activity) and not to the activity itself. This may help explain why substance and non-substance-related addictive behaviors are readily substituted for or supplemented by each other within the same individual.<sup>88</sup>

Although the multiple accessibility of the neurochemical reward system of the brain through behaviours and substances alike makes a highly convincing case and explains phenomena like addiction replacement or fusion (more about that below), addiction is not only a brain disease; other elements are highly significant. As in any addiction, multiple factors seem to be involved, both biological (e.g. androgen abnormality) and socio-cultural (particularly the role of narcissistic damage described below).

The multitude of cognitive-behavioural and psychoanalytic theories trying to describe addiction are applicable to sexual addiction and are very helpful to understand certain elements of the condition.<sup>89</sup> As described in chapter 1, the newer integrative approaches allow the phenomenon to be seen in a much wider context and see both substance and behaviour addictions as possible responses to an underlying vulnerability – the addictive process. This comes at the price of fuzzy boundaries between addiction and non-addiction and requires an individual

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<sup>88</sup> Gold and Heffner, 'Sexual Addiction,' 371.

<sup>89</sup> For a concise summary see Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 39-233.

diagnosis – a behaviour seen on its own gives no indication as to whether it is used addictively.

#### 4.2.3 Diagnosis and Definition

A number of symptomatic and diagnostic definitions of sex addiction are using the language of DSM-IV and replace the word “substance” with “sexual behaviour”.

Various combinations of all seven criteria can be observed in people considered to be sexually addicted. There is continuing discussion as to whether the criteria in DSM-IV are appropriate (e.g. whether withdrawal symptoms are important or not), but, in spite of the distracting discussion of terminology and categorisation, the condition remains the same whatever it is called. ‘Any addictive disorder comprises loss of control (i.e., compulsive behavior), continuation despite adverse circumstances, and obsession or preoccupation with the activity.’<sup>90</sup> Most recent publications seem to agree on two core conditions (for any addiction) mentioned by Goodman:

Sexual addiction is defined as a condition in which some form of sexual behavior that can function both to produce pleasure and to relieve painful affects is employed in a pattern that is characterized by two key features: 1) recurrent failure to control the behavior, and 2) continuation of the sexual behavior despite significant harmful consequences.<sup>91</sup>

The main reason why these behaviours are maladaptive is their persistence in the face of potential substantial adverse consequences like job loss, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or criminal charges.

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<sup>90</sup> Schneider, Jennifer P., 'A Qualitative Study of Cybersex Participants: Gender Differences, Recovery Issues, and Implications for Therapists,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 7, no. 4 (2000), 35.

<sup>91</sup> Goodman, 'Sexual Addiction: Designation and Treatment,' 234.

Additionally, what qualifies behaviours that can be part of a perfectly healthy repertoire of human behaviour as addictive is their function as self-medication; sex is habitually used to medicate one's self perception and one's affects, thus constituting a 'pathological relationship with a mood-altering experience.'<sup>92</sup>

Sexual addiction is thus not a bizarre aberration, nor a new fad, nor even a unique disease. It is simply the addictive process being expressed through sex, the compulsive dependence on some form of sexual behavior as a means of regulating one's feelings and sense of self.<sup>93</sup>

This concept groups together the aforementioned 'nonparaphilic sexual addictions' classified in DSM-III-R and paraphilias, the difference being solely whether the behaviours are *used* addictively or not. Recognising a particular behaviour as part of the addictive process of an individual does therefore not entail a general judgement about a specific behaviour. For some sex addicts compulsive masturbation is part of their acting out and triggers further behaviours with harmful consequences. Achieving sobriety for them involves cessation of masturbation. Recognising this does not entail condemning masturbation in general, certainly not for non-addicts. Likewise, the (attempted) classification of all homosexual behaviour as addictive acting out is thoroughly inappropriate. The evaluation of whether a particular behaviour is part of addictive acting out or is in fact highly beneficial for the individual can only be made for a specific case.

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<sup>92</sup> Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Goodman, 'Sexual Addiction: Designation and Treatment,' 312.

#### 4.2.4 Epidemiology and Prevalence

The estimated prevalence of sexual addiction ranges from 3% to 6% in the population of the United States.<sup>94</sup> These are estimates and the two studies giving these percentages make no mention how these conclusions were reached. Kuzma and Black mention the difficulty of obtaining proper data: problematic sexual behaviour is obviously of a private nature and continues to be stigmatised. Underreporting is highly likely and may also be due to lack of knowledge or denial of the problem.<sup>95</sup>

Another study from 1998 by Cooper, Delmonico and Burg analysed data from 9265 respondents about their internet behaviour. The authors divided users of internet sex into four groups, using scores from the Kalichman Sexual Compulsivity Scale<sup>96</sup>: nonsexually compulsive, moderately sexually compulsive, sexually compulsive and cybersex compulsive. 4.6% fell into the sexually compulsive category and 1% of respondents were categorised as cybersex compulsive.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Carnes, *Don't Call it Love*; Coleman, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?.'

<sup>95</sup> Kuzma, J. M. and D. W. Black, 'Epidemiology, Prevalence, and Natural History of Compulsive Sexual Behavior,' *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 31, no. 4 (2008), 605.

<sup>96</sup> A 10-item measure of sexual compulsivity developed by Kalichman et al. in 1994. See Kalichman, S. C. et al., 'Sexual Sensation Seeking : Scale Development and Predicting AIDS-Risk Behavior among Homosexually Active Men,' *Journal of Personality Assessment* 62, no. 3 (1994); Kalichman, S. C. and D. Rompa, 'Sensation Seeking and Sexual Compulsivity Scales : Reliability, Validity, and Predicting HIV Risk Behavior,' *Journal of Personality Assessment* 65, no. 3 (1995).

<sup>97</sup> Cooper, Al et al., 'Cybersex Users, Abusers, and Compulsives: New Findings and Implications,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 7, no. 1-2 (2000). Described in Geary, Brendan and Ed Hone, 'Sex and the Internet,' in *Sexual Issues : Understanding and Advising in a Christian Context*, ed. Joanne Marie Greer and Brendan Geary (Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew, 2010), 278-79.

### 4.2.5 Gender Issues

The majority of people who use sexual behaviour addictively are men. In one study of 36 persons who self-identified as sex addicts, only 22% were women.<sup>98</sup> Other studies mentioned were only conducted with men – giving no evidence of how many women are affected by the condition.<sup>99</sup> The gender relation seems to be exactly opposite to Bulimia, which is diagnosed for a significant majority of women.

### 4.2.6 Progression

Sexual Addiction is a progressive illness.<sup>100</sup> The symptoms start with something relatively harmless, mostly in adolescence – e.g. sexual fantasising or masturbation. As the addiction progresses, these activities no longer function as a sufficient self-medication against negative affects – the person usually engages in sexual behaviour which is increasingly extreme and detrimental to daily functioning. Although the different levels of sex addiction proposed by Carnes<sup>101</sup> are in my view simply sorting different sexual behaviours according to their social acceptability (or rather non-acceptability) and giving no evidence that addicts progress through exact stages in their developing addiction, the implications of

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<sup>98</sup> Black, D. W. et al., 'Characteristics of 36 Subjects Reporting Compulsive Sexual Behavior,' *American Journal of Psychiatry* 154, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>99</sup> Kuzma and Black, 'Epidemiology, Prevalence, and Natural History of Compulsive Sexual Behavior,' 606.

<sup>100</sup> Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*; Coleman, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?'; Earle and Crow, 'Sexual Addiction.'; Schneider, J. P., 'How to Recognize the Signs of Sexual Addiction - Asking the Right Questions May Uncover Serious Problems,' *Postgraduate Medicine* 90, no. 6 (1991).

<sup>101</sup> Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 23-61.

progression are immense: sexual addiction, if unchecked, will, or at least may, progress into sexual offending. In spite of these potentially enormous effects on public welfare, there seem to be no studies so far to test whether this really happens. However, most sex addicts who ask for help or treatment have reached the point where their addiction has become unbearable without having committed criminal offences.

### **4.3 Excursion: Internet and Cybersex**

The development of the internet in the past 20 years and the availability of sexual stimuli in totally new ways has had an enormous impact on human sexuality. The 'triple-A-engine' of cybersex, a phrase coined in a short article by Al Cooper in 1998,<sup>102</sup> describes the unique qualities of the internet in relation to sexuality: availability, (perceived) anonymity and affordability. The internet, and in connection with it the potential omnipresence of pornography, has resulted in a lot more people being exposed to this material and becoming addicted to it. The instant gratification available through the internet enforces sexual fantasies that would otherwise be extinguished.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas a few decades ago pornography was produced in fairly small quantities and accessible only to a minority of people, an incredible amount of material is now available to every internet user for 24 hours a day. There is no need to leave the house or to risk exposure by going to a shop or a cinema. The internet is

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<sup>102</sup> Cooper, A., 'Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the New Millenium,' *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, no. 1 (1998).

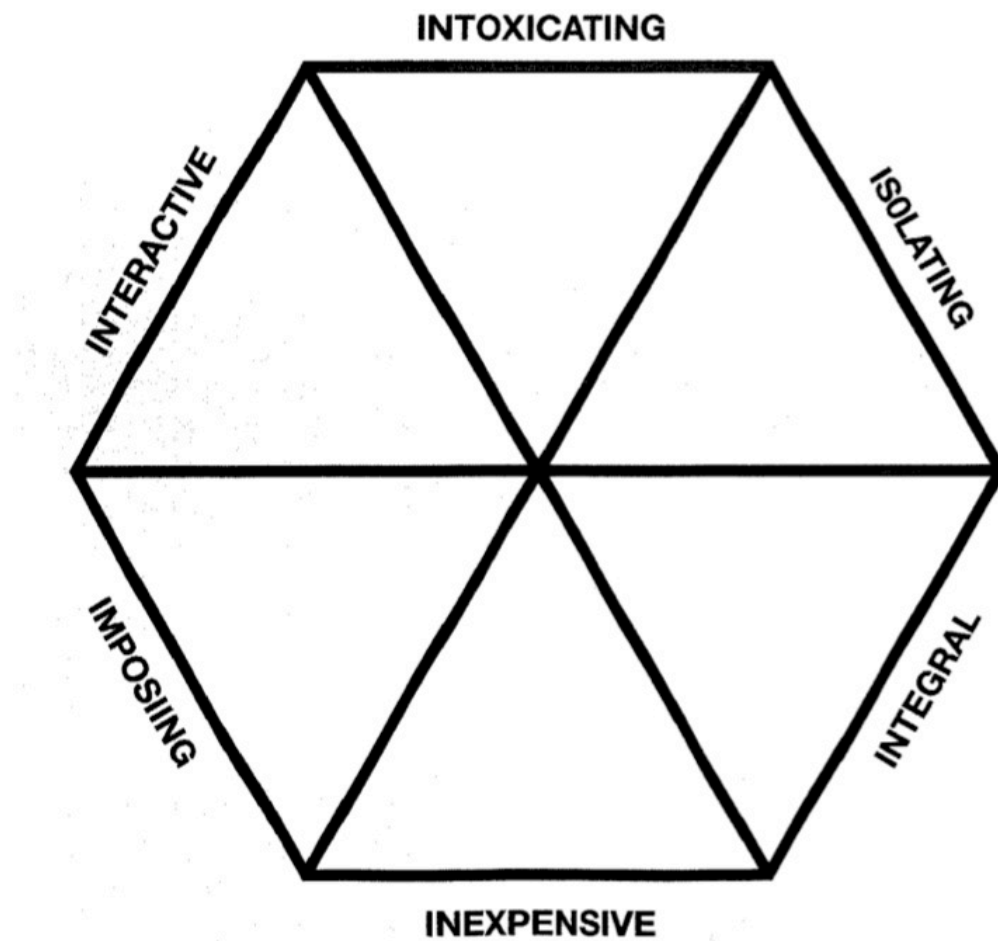
<sup>103</sup> Cooper et al., 'Cybersex Users, Abusers, and Compulsives,' 7.

affordable - the majority of the population in the United States and in Western Europe use the internet.<sup>104</sup> A huge amount of pornographic material is available free of charge – although a lot of material, especially interactive forms of pornography - require payment. Finally, the internet feels anonymous. It is not – every click is logged by providers and in theory can be traced, but in practice surfing the net alone appears to be private.

Delmonico, Griffin and Moriarty created a model they called the “Cyberhex” as a way of understanding why the internet is so powerful and has changed patterns of sexual behaviour for many people – it is an integral part of our lives – but is also imposing, isolating, interactive, inexpensive, and intoxicating.

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Internet World Stats’, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (26 November 2010).

Figure 3 The CyberHex<sup>105</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Integral

For most people in Europe and America the internet is part of their daily personal and work life. The internet is publicly available in a large number of settings (libraries, cafes, airports) and an increasing number of people access the internet through their mobile phones. The social networking platform Facebook has over 500 million users and more than 150 million users access it through their mobile

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<sup>105</sup> Carnes, Patrick J. et al., *In the Shadows of the Net : Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior*, 2. ed. (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 2007), 14.



devices.<sup>106</sup> The availability of the internet increases the dangers of inappropriate use. There is almost no option not to use the internet.

#### **4.3.2 Imposing**

Being an integral part of most people's lives also means that it becomes imposing: it has become an unavoidable necessity. Those with no internet access are disadvantaged as they are excluded from communication (email), cheap offers or are penalised by being charged an extra amount for receiving utility bills on paper.

#### **4.3.3 Isolating**

50% of active Facebook users log on to their network in any given day.<sup>107</sup> Although the internet connects people, it also creates virtual second lives which are extremely time-consuming and diminish the time people spend with real people face to face. These virtual relationships require fewer social skills than real relationships – the amount of Facebook “friends” somebody has says little about the popularity or the social proficiency of that person.

#### **4.3.4 Interactive**

The internet gives the user control over what they see and receive to a much greater extent than other media such as television. In relation to pornography, one can choose from a huge amount of material and decide what takes place and which fantasy is visualised.

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<sup>106</sup> 'Facebook: Press Room: Statistics', <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics> (26 November 2010).

<sup>107</sup> 'Facebook: Press Room: Statistics', <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics> (26 November 2010).

#### **4.3.5 Inexpensive**

The internet offers a 'low-cost means to a sexual high.'<sup>108</sup> In comparison to paying for printed pornography or prostitutes, the cost of the internet is negligible. This increases the anonymity: engagement in cybersex does not necessarily involve huge financial cost which would make the user's actions seem suspicious.

#### **4.3.6 Intoxicating**

Most people spend more time online than they intend to. Other media like TV or radio can be intoxicating as well, but in combination with the other qualities mentioned the internet has the capacity to take over people's lives.<sup>109</sup>

#### **4.3.7 Economics**

Sex on the internet is huge business. It constitutes the third largest economic sector on the web, following software and computers.<sup>110</sup> The development of newer technologies like videoconferencing has been driven by those who use these resources for cybersex – adding another level of interactive intoxication.

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<sup>108</sup> Carnes et al., *In the Shadows of the Net*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> cf. Flisher, C., 'Getting Plugged in: an Overview of Internet Addiction,' *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 46, no. 10 (2010).

<sup>110</sup> Carnes et al., *In the Shadows of the Net*, 7.

#### 4.3.8 Conclusion

The use of the internet will continue to explode and the availability of multimedia pornography and cybersex will increase. Cybersex is not only a medium that sex addicts use to feed their addiction, but 'more and more clinicians are encountering patients whose presenting problem either stems from or is manifestly online sexual compulsivity.'<sup>111</sup> The unique intoxicating qualities of the internet will continue to change people's sexuality.

#### 4.4 Addiction Cycles

Though the terminology is slightly diverse, most authors seem to agree that sexual addiction follows a cyclical pattern.<sup>112</sup> This addictive system is triggered and fuelled by negative affects or self-image. Addiction is present, if outside relief is habitually obtained through sex.

Loneliness, low self esteem, and anxiety cause individuals to lose control over their sexual behaviors, which poses grave threats to ongoing relationships and careers. Despite these risks, sex addicts engage in these practices because they offer temporary relief from psychic distress. This relief is described as a sexual "fix" or "high" similar to the ones obtained from illegal drugs, alcohol, or food.<sup>113</sup>

Following Patrick Carnes, the following cycle appears:<sup>114</sup>

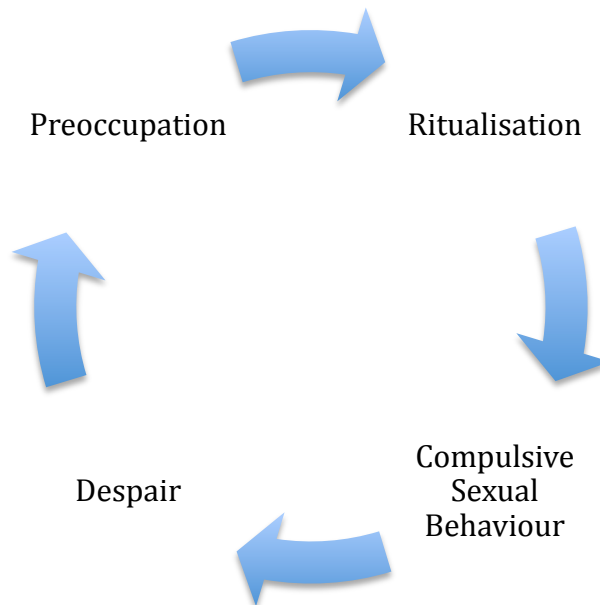
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<sup>111</sup> Cooper et al., 'Cybersex Users, Abusers, and Compulsives,' 7.

<sup>112</sup> Coleman, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?'; Earle and Crow, 'Sexual Addiction.'; Goodman, 'Sexual Addiction: Designation and Treatment.'; Schneider, 'How to Recognize the Signs of Sexual Addiction.'; Schwartz, 'Sexual Compulsivity as Posttraumatic-Stress-Disorder.'; Wolf, S., 'A Model of Sexual Aggression/Addiction,' *Journal of Social Work & Human Sexuality* 7, no. 1 (1988).

<sup>113</sup> Levine and Troiden, 'The Myth of Sexual Compulsivity,' 349.

<sup>114</sup> Carnes, *Contrary to Love*, 61-68.



#### **4.4.1 Preoccupation**

The cycle starts with a trance or mood wherein the addicts' minds are completely engrossed with thoughts of sex. This mental state creates an obsessive search for sexual stimulation (e.g. driving around to look at women). This preoccupation with sexual thoughts and fantasies is extremely time-consuming and leads to low productivity.

#### **4.4.2 Ritualisation**

Addicts enhance their preoccupation with rituals, which lead up to the sexual behaviour. The ritual intensifies the preoccupation, adding arousal and excitement (e.g. starting to look at pictures which become increasingly explicit). Rituals may include the setting up of scenarios that result in a feeling of entitlement to act out sexually – e.g. engaging in a domestic argument or overworking. Rituals are highly individualistic and lead almost inevitably to acting out.

### **4.4.3 Compulsive Sexual Behaviour**

The actual acting out, which is the end goal of the preoccupation and ritualisation. Once this has started, addicts are usually unable to stop unless they encounter a massive interference or shock.

### **4.4.4 Despair**

Following their acting out, the initial motivation for the addictive cycle is not resolved but usually intensified through the behaviour that is engaged in. I am aware of somebody who was terrified of infecting himself with HIV but acted out with anonymous sex in saunas. This behaviour, which was thoroughly illogical and in direct contrast to his anxieties, intensified his anxieties to the point where he acted out again. Addicts feel utter hopelessness about their behaviour and their powerlessness.

### **4.4.5 Function**

The effect of these circular patterns is that the phases of preoccupation and ritualisation of the cycle are pain-free zones; the compulsive sexual behaviour however leads to guilt, shame and intense pain, which needs to be dealt with, usually by acting out again.

The addict's intense emotional pain is transformed into pleasure during the preoccupation and ritualization stages, becoming euphoria during the fleeting moments of sexual release. However, following the climax

experience, the addict plummets into shame and despair more deeply with each repetition of the cycle. Isolation also increases.<sup>115</sup>

Although this circular model is relatively neat and tidy, research in the past years has shown that it is too simplistic. The addiction cycle visualises only excessive sexual behaviour. Clinicians and writers in the field have noticed two more factors which need to be taken into account:

- a) sexually addictive behaviour is not restricted to excessive sexual behaviour but includes sexual deprivation of different kinds and at different periods of time.
- b) the addiction cycle should not be restricted to sexual behaviour, but addictive behaviour of sex addicts often happens in a number of different areas. In many cases there is a co-morbidity with substance abuse and other compulsive behaviours which interact with the sexual addiction.

## 4.5 Sexual Anorexia

### 4.5.1 Terminology

The concept of sexual anorexia or sexual aversion disorder has been presented as part of the spectrum of sexual addiction. Carnes defined it as 'an obsessive state in which the physical, mental, and emotional task of avoiding sex dominates one's life.'<sup>116</sup> The labelling is unfortunate, DSM-IV speaks instead of sexual aversion disorder,<sup>117</sup> which is a much more appropriate term.

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<sup>115</sup> Carnes, *Don't Call it Love*, 67.

<sup>116</sup> Carnes and Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia*, 1.

<sup>117</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-IV*, 499.

*An-orexis* just means loss of appetite, which applied to sexuality could be caused by depression or a physical illness and is in itself a neutral descriptive term, not necessarily implying a pathology. For sex addicts this could even be a positive fruit of sobriety: loss of sexual appetite. However, the term is used to describe sexual aversion disorder, deliberately in parallel to Anorexia Nervosa, which in DSM-IV has the following essential features:

‘the individual refuses to maintain a minimally normal body weight, is intensely afraid of gaining weight, and exhibits a significant disturbance in the perception of the shape or size to his or her body. In addition, postmenarcheal females with this disorder are amenorrheic. (The term anorexia is a misnomer because loss of appetite is rare.)<sup>118</sup>

Considering those criteria, any referral to sexuality makes no sense at all. However, the term sexual anorexia remains widely used.

#### **4.5.2 Function**

Similarly to food deprivation behaviour or the compulsive hoarding of money, sexual starvation can offer pleasurable feelings of control and can be used to control one’s affects and perception of self. It has long been noticed that deprivation behaviours of various kinds share common characteristics.<sup>119</sup>

According to the research, most addicts are not only prone to excessive appetites and experience craving if they withdraw from their particular behaviour, but these excessive appetites interact with areas or periods of compulsive aversion.

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<sup>118</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-IV*, 539.

<sup>119</sup> Kaplan, Helen Singer, *The Sexual Desire Disorders : Dysfunctional Regulation of Sexual Motivation* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995).

Deprivation and addiction share similar psychological architectures and are able to serve similar functions.<sup>120</sup>

Within the integrative theoretical framework sexual anorexia appears as another possible response to the underlying addictive process, appearing in isolation as well as in binge-purge scenarios of different kinds. Four different constellations are possible and have been observed by practitioners:

a) Somebody is almost solely sexually compulsive or sexually anorectic and the other side of the spectrum is invisible.

This used to be seen as the norm among addicts, but may just be a long binge or purge phase of somebody who is a “periodic addict”, following the pattern described in c). In this case it is also possible that somebody else close to the addict acts out the other part of the continuum as described in d).

b) sexual addiction and anorexia occurs within the same person at the same time.

This is very common but the sexual anorexia is often hidden due to the high level of suffering caused by the sexual compulsion. A possible scenario could be a sex addict acting out with anonymous sex with a large number of partners and compulsively avoiding sexuality connected with intimacy – making them unable to function sexually with their partners or spouses. Only in recovery, when the acting out behaviour ceases, do addicts then notice their inability for sexual intimacy and start to address this area of their addiction.

c) sexual addiction and anorexia are part of a binge-purge scenario.

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<sup>120</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 92; Huebner, *Endorphins, Eating Disorders and other Addictive Behaviors*.



This often looks like a), depending on the periods of time spent on either side of the addiction continuum. Many cases like this have been described in the clinical literature.<sup>121</sup> The case of the religious minister who preaches against sexual immorality in his professional life and acts out sexually on occasions is almost proverbial. The situation where someone's sexual acting out behaviour is stopped through a shock from outside is also very common: somebody is found out by an employer, a family member or by the police and switches to an anorectic form of sexual addiction – the huge problem is that this may be sexual sobriety in one area, but it is certainly not the same as recovery.

d) sexual addiction and anorexia are part of a family system.

If a sex addict acts out sexually, the anorectic part of the continuum may be expressed by a family member. This can also cross generations: it is no coincidence that children of alcoholics often become compulsive teetotallers, whereas their own children may return to alcohol abuse.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that addictive behaviour is not restricted to one area, but there are typical co-morbidities and addicts can use different types of addictive behaviour with similar effect. This has been termed alternating addiction cycles,<sup>122</sup> addictive cycles<sup>123</sup> or oscillating cycles of control and release.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> e.g. Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'; Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.'; Knauer, Sandy, *Recovering from Sexual Abuse, Addictions, and Compulsive Behaviors : "Numb" Survivors* (New York: Haworth Social Work Practice Press, 2002).

<sup>122</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.'

<sup>123</sup> Schwartz, Mark F., 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives on Sexually Compulsive Behavior,' *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 31, no. 4 (2008), 582.

<sup>124</sup> Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'

#### 4.6 Addiction Interaction: Alternating Addiction Cycles or Oscillating Cycles of Control and Release

If one accepts the proposition that all addictions are expressions of an underlying process – the addictive process – and that different addictive behaviours share similar psychological architecture and are able to serve similar functions, then it should not be surprising that addicts notice that their addiction focus shifts according to a patterned systemic way.

There are a number of clinical studies looking at connections between sexual addiction and other dependencies.<sup>125</sup> Somebody who has been diagnosed with sexual addiction often shows comorbidity with addiction to a psychoactive drug, an eating disorder or pathological gambling.<sup>126</sup> Empirical data for sex addiction is relatively sparse, but there is a wealth of documentation looking at the concurrent use of alcohol and other drugs. 'For the contemporary drug addict, multiple drug use and addiction that includes alcohol, is the rule. The monodrug user and addict is a vanishing species in American culture.'<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 80; Gordon, L. III et al., 'Sexual Behaviors of Patients in a Residential Chemical Dependency Program : Comparison of Sexually Compulsive Physicians and Non-Physicians with Non-Sexually Compulsive Physicians and Non-Physicians,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 2, no. 4 (1995); Irons, R. R. and Mark R. Laaser, 'The Abduction of Fidelity : Sexual Exploitation by Clergy - Experience with Inpatient Assessment,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 2, no. 2 (1994); Irons, R. R. and J. P. Schneider, 'Sexual Addiction: Significant Factor in Sexual Exploitation by Health Care Professionals,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 1 (1994); Schwartz, Mark F. and Leigh Cohn, *Sexual Abuse and Eating Disorders* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1996).

<sup>126</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 148.

<sup>127</sup> Miller, N. S. et al., 'Multiple Addictions: Co-Synchronous Use of Alcohol and Drugs,' *New York State Journal of Medicine* 90, no. 12 (1990), 597.

Patrick Carnes conducted a case study with 1604 patients who showed some form of sexual disorder. Between 69% and 80% of this group fitted the diagnostic criteria of other addictions.<sup>128</sup> He concludes that 'addictions coexist and manifest common characteristics' and 'may have common etiology, which would mean they are more intricately connected than we have assumed'<sup>129</sup>, and that 'deprivations are also part of the "dance" of addiction interaction.'<sup>130</sup> His empirical study confirms that 'addictions do more than coexist. They in fact interact, reinforce, and become part of one another.'<sup>131</sup>

Carnes describes various ways in which these interactions can take place: One behaviour can function to mask a different behaviour ('I only sleep around if I am drunk') or to numb or disinhibit before engaging in a particular compulsive behaviour (drinking before acting out sexually); rituals can merge seemingly unconnected behaviours and increase excitement (e.g. buying cocaine from prostitutes is part of sexual and drug taking acting out). Rituals can link 'various compulsive behaviours before they start or one behaviour enhances or is ritualistic to the other behaviour.'<sup>132</sup> Addictions may intensify each other to the point of fusion dependence, where one addiction fully potentiates other addictive behaviour to the point where they do not occur separately any more. Finally, most convincing in illustrating that addictions are symptoms of an underlying pathology and share aetiology and structure, is the fact that addictions are interchangeable

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<sup>128</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 82.

<sup>129</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 84.

<sup>130</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 86.

<sup>131</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 87.

<sup>132</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 95.

and can replace each other. There are a number of cases where sex addicts switched from sexual acting out to cocaine abuse, 'including a level of tolerance for the new activity that was impacted by the previous one.'<sup>133</sup> The behaviour can change relatively easily if the effect on the human brain is similar.

Carnes describes a number of cases where sexual addiction interacts in a binge-purge scenario with other addictions: He describes one woman in detail who for periods of her life was sexually promiscuous and compulsively aversive to food where at other times she was compulsively overeating and sexually aversive. In her case, addiction presented as a package – as a structured pattern of addiction interaction or as alternating addiction cycles.

Thaddeus Birchard noticed comorbidity between sexual addiction and pathological religious behaviour and describes this as an oscillating cycle of control and release; 'an alteration between cycles of control and release similar to anorexic/bulimic patterns of behaviour.'<sup>134</sup>

The pain following acting out can motivate addicts to enter their control cycle and temporarily stop their damaging behaviour, particularly if some outside event has heightened this experience of distress (being found out, experiencing physical violence). However, they easily relapse into their release cycle, often through feelings of entitlement ('I have been good for 3 weeks and worked very hard at the office, I deserve something special').

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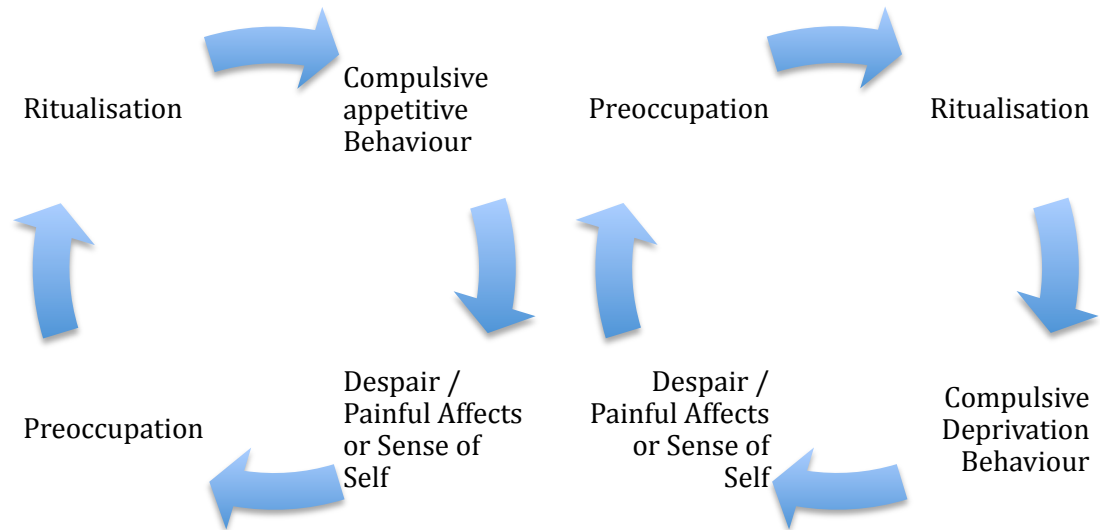
<sup>133</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos,' 89.

<sup>134</sup> Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World,' 3.

## 4.7 Summary

The original addiction cycle by Carnes pictured above could be expanded in the following way:

**Figure 4 Addiction/Release - Deprivation/Control Cycles**



What appears is a figure of eight, where the central negative affect states or painful sense of self can be medicated by various addictive behaviours of excessive appetite or deprivation, and these behaviours can appear apart, together, as part of a family system, or at different periods of time.

It needs to be said at this stage that there is a lack of data about the precise patterns of behaviour, which behaviours occur together, whether this is always the case or only in some cases, and what influences this.<sup>135</sup> The described patterns and

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<sup>135</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.' offers some statistical data, and though the conclusions are supporting the claims of Fossum and Mason or Bradshaw they do appear to need backing up by further studies.

cycles are based on clinical experience and do not appear to be well researched in a properly scientific sense. There seems to be more scientific research needed to confirm all of this.

The complicated patterns of addictive behaviours that individuals develop apparently stem from an underlying vulnerability. This presents the question of how this underlying vulnerability develops and why sexuality becomes the “drug of choice”.

## **4.8 Aetiology of Sex-Addiction**

### **4.8.1 Trauma and Compulsive Trauma Re-Enactment**

The addictive process - the underlying vulnerability to addiction - has been defined by Goodman as an ‘enduring, inordinately strong tendency to engage in some form of pleasure-producing behavior as a means of relieving painful affects and/or regulating one’s sense of self.’<sup>136</sup>

This addictive process has two constituting qualities:

(1) impairment of the self-regulation system, the internal psychobiological system that regulates one’s subjective (sensory, emotional, and cognitive) states and one’s behavioral states; and (2) a tendency to depend on external action to cope with the effects of impaired self-regulation, which reflects a relative incapacity to utilize other, more healthy and adaptive ways of coping.<sup>137</sup>

Apart from constitutional (i.e. hereditary) contributions to this process, the results of research in the area of trauma seems to be highly significant for the

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<sup>136</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 160.

<sup>137</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 160.

understanding of the addictive process. Trauma seems to cause precisely the kind of damage described by the addictive process. Research in post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has made it apparent that 'PTSD causes major changes in one's capacity for self-regulation.'<sup>138</sup>

Equally importantly, the kind of trauma someone suffers seems to determine the ways in which they try to cope with the trauma in the future. Trauma which involves sexuality is often answered with a compulsive sexual response.

In one of their studies Patrick Carnes and David Delmonico report that 80% of sex addicts have survived a history of abuse.<sup>139</sup> Schwartz agrees that 'child abuse and neglect are common factors in the histories of individuals who manifest hypo- and hypersexualities.'<sup>140</sup>

Abuse during childhood seems to have particular power in supporting or creating the addictive process and – particularly if the abuse was sexual or sexualised violence – in disposing the victim for sexual addiction. The reason for this is that trauma victims paradoxically try to cope with their own damage by harming others, by acting self-destructively and by re-victimisation. According to Bessel van der Kolk, one of the leading trauma experts in the US, trauma is compulsively repeated – mostly unconsciously – by either harming others in similar ways to how oneself has been harmed, or by harming oneself: e.g. through addiction, self-mutilation, or by repeatedly putting oneself into situations where one is likely to

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<sup>138</sup> Khantzian, 'Trauma and Addictive Suffering,' 464.

<sup>139</sup> Carnes, Patrick J. and David L. Delmonico, 'Childhood Abuse and Multiple Addictions: Research Findings in a Sample of Self-Identified Sexual Addicts,' *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 3, no. 11 (1996). Other studies report lower numbers, but it seems unclear to me how abuse is defined.

<sup>140</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 572.

become re-victimised. This explains why prostitutes are often victims of incest.<sup>141</sup>

‘Victimized people neutralize their hyperarousal by a variety of addictive behaviors including compulsive re-exposure to situations reminiscent of the trauma.’<sup>142</sup> Bergner<sup>143</sup> noted that patients treated for sexual abuse during childhood follow a recurrent pattern in their behaviour and argued that fantasy scenarios are derived from early experiences of degradation. He suggests that sexual addiction represents an internalised attempt to recover from the trauma of that degradation. This mechanism seems to be widely accepted in the literature about child abuse:

Abused children discover they can produce release through emotions becoming dysregulated and the child is unable to find a consistent strategy for establishing comfort and security under stress. Such individuals become more likely to exhibit self-destructive behavior – acting in or acting out.<sup>144</sup>

The original trauma has lasting effects on the survivor on many levels: not only the behaviour or the emotions are affected, but ‘traumatization also causes dysregulation of the endogenous opioid system in both animals and humans.’<sup>145</sup>

The repetition of trauma is therefore sought on all the levels originally affected; ‘trauma is repeated on behavioural, emotional, physiologic, and

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<sup>141</sup> Silbert, M. H. and A. M. Pines, 'Early Sexual Exploitation as an Influence in Prostitution,' *Social Work* 28, no. 4 (1983); van der Kolk, Bessel A., 'The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma : Re-enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism,' *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 12, no. 2 (1989), 396.

<sup>142</sup> van der Kolk, 'The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma,' 401.

<sup>143</sup> Bergner, R. M., 'Sexual Compulsion as Attempted Recovery from Degradation: Theory and Therapy,' *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 28, no. 5 (2002).

<sup>144</sup> Herman, J., 'Sex Offenders: a Feminist Perspective,' in *Handbook of Sexual Assault : Issues, Theories and Treatment of the Offender*, ed. W. L. Marshall, et al. (New York: Plenum Press, 1990).

<sup>145</sup> van der Kolk, 'The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma,' 396.



neuroendocrinologic levels, whose confluence explains the diversity of repetition phenomena.'<sup>146</sup>

In connection with sexuality the process has been described earlier by Stoller in 1976, labelling the resulting sexual disorder a perversion:

'A perversion is the reliving of actual historical sexual trauma aimed precisely at one's sex [...] or gender identity [...] and that in the perverse act the past is rubbed out. This time trauma is turned into pleasure, orgasm, victory. [...] It is no coincidence that the fantasy picks out the greatest trauma for what is its moment of greatest thrill.'<sup>147</sup> 'With fantasy, trauma is undone, and in the daydream [...] it can be undone, over and over as necessary.'<sup>148</sup>

Tragically, the original trauma often leads to memory disturbances. The trauma victim may repeat the trauma unconsciously: the abused woman who is unable to resist any sexual advances does not remember her incest experience. Somebody for whom orgasm is only possible through sexual stimulation in connection with painful sado-masochistic practices does not remember how sexuality has become fused with pain and violence through childhood abuse.<sup>149</sup>

Trauma re-enactment can be unconscious and compulsive, paradoxically as a way of mastering the trauma. Emotional and physical pain may "feel good" and provide an escape from the numbness and emptiness that result from the original experience. Adults traumatised during childhood seem to be "frozen" at the point

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<sup>146</sup> van der Kolk, 'The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma,' 389.

<sup>147</sup> Stoller, Robert J., *Perversion : the Erotic Form of Hatred* (New York: Dell, 1976), 6.

<sup>148</sup> Stoller, *Perversion*, 8.

<sup>149</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 575; van der Kolk, Bessel A. et al., 'The Body Keeps the Score,' in *Traumatic Stress : the Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).

of their trauma, acting out the violence experienced over and over again in their self-destructive decisions.

These re-enactments can become addictive and serve as distractions from the internal emptiness and constriction and give the individual the illusion of temporary connectedness, power, control, and relief from loneliness and depression. This reliance is further potentiated by endorphin release, extreme alterations in cortisol regulation, and dopamine release from the median eminence.<sup>150</sup>

Traumatic experiences create a bond between victim and abuser (e.g. the well-known Stockholm Syndrome), but the experiences create a bond between previously disconnected emotions as well:

'Men and women who are sexually abused frequently present clinically with violent paraphilic sexual arousal and imagery, which is the result of "trauma bonding". In trauma bonding, there is a pairing of sexual arousal with terror and violence at a critical stage in the child's development. Thereafter, there is a tendency to revisit the terror and high arousal, as if to master, complete, or comprehend it.'<sup>151</sup>

The "opponent process theory of acquired motivation" explains how fear may become a pleasurable sensation and that "the laws of social attachment may be identical to those of drug addiction." Victims can become addicted to their victimizers; social contact may activate endogenous opioid systems, alleviating separation distress and strengthening social bonds. [...] Thus, re-exposure to stress can have the same effect as taking exogenous opioids, providing a similar relief from stress.'<sup>152</sup>

Traumatic damage has effects which can lead to sexual addiction, but apart from an excessive sexual appetite, other repetition phenomena are possible, giving further evidence that the restriction of an addiction definition to substances or

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<sup>150</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 575.

<sup>151</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 575.

<sup>152</sup> van der Kolk, Bessel A., 'The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma : Re-enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism,' *ibid.* 12, no. 2 (1989), 405.

excessive behaviours is insufficient: trauma repetition presents us with a whole spectrum of phenomena involved in addiction.

#### **4.8.1.1 Diversity of Repetition Phenomena**

Van der Kolk explains the diversity of repetition phenomena with the different levels affected by traumatic damage.

Trauma is repeated on behavioural, emotional, physiologic, and neuroendocrinologic levels, whose confluence explains the diversity of repetition phenomena.<sup>153</sup>

##### **4.8.1.1.1 Harming Others**

The borders between sexual victims and sexual offenders are fluid. Sexual addiction is not the same as sexual offending, but for many sex addicts criminal or abusive acts are part of their acting out (e.g. pornography, child-pornography, sado-masochism, emotional abuse). The majority of sexual offenders have been victims of sexualised abuse – child abuse in itself has been described as similar to addiction.<sup>154</sup>

Apart from harm classifiable in criminal terms, all addicts cause enormous harm to others: they are emotionally absent, they live double lives, they are disengaged from relationships, they lie and cheat consciously and they are in denial about the extent of their dependency and its consequences. Addiction is a disease with many victims in every case.

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<sup>153</sup> van der Kolk, 'The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma,' 389.

<sup>154</sup> Fossum, Merle A. and Marilyn J. Mason, *Facing Shame : Families in Recovery* (New York: Norton, 1986), 142-44.

4.8.1.1.2 Harming Oneself

Self harm following trauma can take a variety of forms. Apart from excessive appetites this includes deprivation behaviours and more direct physical self harm like self-cutting. In spite of this being obviously painful, individuals describe their response as “an intensely pleasurable release” that helps them feel alive.<sup>155</sup>

In the language of 12-step groups, ‘compulsive re-enactment often includes “acting-in” compulsions, such as self-cutting or eating disorder, or “acting-out” compulsions, such as hypersexual acting out or destructive relationship re-enactments, such as picking alcoholic partners or entering battering relationships.’<sup>156</sup>

The research shows that the sexual damage incurred through association with loss of control or violence can be played out in a large number of destructive ways, ranging from repetitive affairs, repetitive romantic entanglement, low sexual drive or compulsive sexual aversion. Rates of child abuse among prostitutes range at about 80%<sup>157</sup> whereas some religious sisters who are survivors of abuse have made a very public statement of not being sexually active (and indeed of not being sexually “available”)<sup>158</sup> - which shows that the same traumatic damage can cause different and seemingly disconnected responses.

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<sup>155</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 576.

<sup>156</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 575.

<sup>157</sup> cf. Silbert and Pines, 'Early Sexual Exploitation as an Influence in Prostitution.'

<sup>158</sup> Brendan Geary, Durham; private conversation (30 September 2010).

### 4.8.1.1.3 Somatic Responses

The variety of responses to trauma have, as has already been mentioned, a somatic aspect or are biologically mediated (e.g. through a disturbance of the opioid system or excessive sexual appetite having a hormonal aspect). A variety of medical symptoms from stomach pains to headaches or inability to sleep can be related to trauma.

### 4.8.1.1.4 Gender

Trauma also leaks into somatic function in gender-specific ways: symptoms related to sexuality are more common in males whereas eating disorders are more common in females.<sup>159</sup> This fits the observation that individuals suffering from bulimia are 70% females whereas about a similar percentage of sex addicts are male. Men typically include excessive working, drinking, eating or sex in their cycles of control and release.

### 4.8.1.1.5 Deprivation

A multitude of behaviours classifiable as deprivations serve the same function to regulate the internal state as excessive behaviours: to avoid encountering or remembering situations that are terrifying. Food starvation, sexual avoidance and physical self harm seem to be more common in females whereas the 'masculine counterpart in acting-in behaviour consists of rigid rules and rituals to bind the anxiety and quell the fear that they have at an unconscious level.'<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 575.

<sup>160</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 577.

4.8.1.1.6 “Codependency”

The phenomenon of codependency – ‘the fallacy of trying to control interior feelings by controlling people, things and events on the outside’<sup>161</sup> is much discussed in 12-step fellowships but little written about in academic texts.

However, one possible outgrowth of trauma is apparently the tendency to make disastrous choices in personal relationships, to put oneself in a position where revictimisation is highly likely: e.g. by marrying an abusive spouse or somebody who is an addict.

**4.8.1.2 Summary**

The mechanism of sexual “triumph over tragedy” through trauma repetition explains why compulsive sexual behaviour can become the most important outlet for regulating one’s inner state and creating the illusion of control. ‘It allows for intimacy without connection as a survival solution to feared annihilation.’<sup>162</sup> It can become the only response for needing nurture, care or sexual outlet in spite of being terrified by closeness.

Abused and neglected children anticipate abandonment, rejection, unfairness, and conflict with caretakers and teachers, which then leads to powerful feelings of rage, anxiety and helplessness. Unable to establish safety in or out of the home, they survive by suppressing affect and then are compulsively driven to activity for release.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Hemfelt, Robert et al., *Love is a Choice* (London: Monarch Books, 2002).

<sup>162</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 581.

<sup>163</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 574.

Apparently traumatic events damage the ability of individuals to develop skills in pair-bonding, courtship, attraction, love, affection, and intimacy. Schwartz tries to explain why sexually traumatised individuals can then become hypersexual and incapable of intimacy:

Without adequate parenting a child grapples with “increased” appetite for nurturing and caretaking while simultaneously adapting by becoming dismissive of such needs, with expectations of being hurt, disappointed and abandoned. [...] Preoccupied individuals certainly turn to more and more sex to fill the needs for caretaking, whereas avoidant individuals use sexual activity to be alone and disconnect but still feel alive and experience some affective respite from emptiness through the intense release.<sup>164</sup>

Men in particular can become completely disassociated from their feelings, to such an extent that they are so numb that the only feelings left are irritation and sexual arousal. Any strong emotions then become synonymous with a desire for compulsive acting out (I’m lonely = I need sex; I’m frustrated = I need sex; I’m angry = I need sex; I’m tired = I need sex; I’m sad = I need a sexual partner).<sup>165</sup>

Apparently patterns for one’s sexuality become fixed during adolescence. What somebody finds arousing and what triggers sexual fantasies is something which becomes cemented before adulthood.<sup>166</sup> John Money labelled these patterns “love maps”: ‘a personalized developmental representation or template in the mind or in the brain that depicts the idealized lover and the idealized program of sexerotic activity with the lover as projected in imagery and idealization or actually engaged

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<sup>164</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 571.

<sup>165</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 575.

<sup>166</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 581.

in with that lover.'<sup>167</sup> Human love maps can become vandalised at an early age and then remain vandalised. Traumatic damage suffered in childhood is likely to remain a life-long burden, which has consequences for how individuals explore and develop their sexuality for the rest of their lives.

The diversity of compulsive repetition phenomena has enormous explanatory power as to why addiction is contagious and is passed on in families and social systems, and as to why apparently contradictory responses can be part of the same trauma repetition and of an individual cycle of control and release.

But what about those sex addicts who never experienced sexual abuse during childhood and whose love maps have not been vandalised? The highest rate of sex addicts experiencing sexual abuse is reported by Carnes and Delmonico.<sup>168</sup> Black et al.<sup>169</sup> report a rate of 31% and Kafka and Prentky<sup>170</sup> find that only 28% have a history of sexual abuse. The data is sparse and one could criticise how exactly sexual abuse is defined, but there are apparently at least 20% of sex addicts who are not survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Apart from constitutional factors there seems to be another aspect in the development of the addictive process and in the function of addictive behaviour that might explain this gap.

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<sup>167</sup> Money, John, *Lovemaps : Clinical Concepts of Sexual/Erotic Health and Pathology, Paraphilia, and Gender Transposition of Childhood, Adolescence, and Maturity* (New York: Irvington, 1986); Money, John and Margaret Lamacz, *Vandalized Lovemaps : Paraphilic Outcome of Seven Cases in Pediatric Sexology* (New York: Prometheus, 1989).

<sup>168</sup> Carnes and Delmonico, 'Childhood Abuse and Multiple Addictions.'

<sup>169</sup> Black et al., 'Characteristics.'

<sup>170</sup> Kafka, M. P. and R. Prentky, 'A Comparative Study of Nonparaphilic Sexual Addictions and Paraphilias in Men,' *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 53, no. 10 (1992).



#### 4.8.1.3 *Shame and Guilt*

Family therapists Merle Fossum and Marilyn Mason wrote a book in 1986 describing families who are distorted by shame. Shame has detrimental effects and is distinct from guilt. Both feelings are painful, but guilt is a feeling of regret and responsibility about an action or behaviour that has violated a personal value. Feelings of guilt do not directly reflect upon one's identity or one's sense of worth. In contrast, shame is a negative feeling about oneself as a person, being associated with feelings of unworthiness, wrongness, being unwanted, unlovable or dirty. Whereas guilt offers the possibility of reparation and personal growth and can be a motivation towards this, shame is corrosive, inhibiting and offers no positive effects.<sup>171</sup>

Shame is an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging the self. A moment of shame may be humiliation so painful or an indignity so profound that one feels one has been robbed of her or his dignity or exposed as basically inadequate, bad, or worthy of rejection. A pervasive sense of shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as human being.<sup>172</sup>

The above definition is phenomenological; there is no commonly agreed definition of what shame is.<sup>173</sup> This is one of the frustrations of the whole exercise, that the terms used are necessarily nebulous. Shame shares this quality with other 'deutero-truths' which are 'inexplicit and vague' and in spite of everybody

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<sup>171</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 5.

<sup>172</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 5.

<sup>173</sup> Pattison, Stephen, *Shame : Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94.

apparently know what they mean elude precise definition.<sup>174</sup> I will offer a theological definition of shame later on, but at this stage the above definition will have to suffice. Whilst Fossum and Mason define shame as thoroughly negative, there are other authors who distinguish between different kinds of shame, some of which are valued positively.

Pattison recognises four different classifications of shame: one type can be labelled as ontological shame. This kind of shame is related to being human, finite, mortal, embodied, dependent on others.<sup>175</sup> This is an ontological reality<sup>176</sup> which nothing can be done about except recognition and acceptance.

The second type can be described as normal or healthy shame, akin to awe and reverence, marking and maintaining boundaries of respect for self and others and thus serving an important social function.<sup>177</sup>

Usually emotions are passing experiences. Whereas healthy shame is an acute and short-lived state, the type of shame referred to by Fossum and Mason is a chronic state. For some 'shame is a permanent trait or sentiment rather than a temporary state.'<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Rappaport, Roy A., *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 308.

<sup>175</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 181. Referring to Hans, James S., *The Origins of the Gods* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991).

<sup>176</sup> Tillich, Paul, *The Courage to Be*, 2. ed. (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000).

<sup>177</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 181. Referring to Scheff, Thomas J., *Emotions, the Social Bond, and Human Reality : Part/Whole Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Schneider, Carl D., *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1977).

<sup>178</sup> Tantam, Digby, 'The Emotional Disorders of Shame,' in *Shame : Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, ed. Paul June Gilbert and Bernice Andrews (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 168.

Finally, shame can be experienced as a social or psychological reality. For example, for specific groups in society, shame can be an objective social condition (“dirty paedophiles”), whereas the problematic state described by Fossum and Mason is a condition perceived as a psychological emotion of internal (and internalised) badness. Nevertheless, the two dimensions are often interconnected. Wurmser identifies three different types of shame. His definition of ‘shame attitude’ corresponds to chronic or toxic shame.<sup>179</sup>

The type of shame related to the addictive process, chronic, toxic or character shame, or shame attitude, is distinct from any healthy or positive kinds:

What I discovered was that shame as a healthy human emotion can be transformed into shame as a state of being. As a state of being shame takes over one's whole identity. To have shame as an identity is to believe that one's being is flawed, that one is defective as a human being. Once shame is transformed into an identity, it becomes toxic and dehumanizing.<sup>180</sup>

Pattison describes chronic shame as ‘toxic unwantedness,’<sup>181</sup> a chronic state and perception of oneself, which he connects with the notion of miasma: dirty, dangerous, expelled, ignored; abjection, abomination, abnegation or affliction.<sup>182</sup> Chronic shame is a painful sense of ‘self-consciousness, self-alienation, depletion, defectiveness, defilement, weakness, inferiority, and inarticulacy.’<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Wurmser, Leon, *The Mask of Shame* (Northvale, N.J.: Aronson, 1991), 49-56. Similarly, Fowler, James W., *Faithful Change : The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996). Distinguishes five types of shame, among them ‘toxic shame’. Karen, Robert, ‘Shame,’ *The Atlantic Monthly* 269, no. 2 (1992). Suggests four categories, among them ‘narcissistic shame’.

<sup>180</sup> Bradshaw, John, *Healing the Shame that Binds You* (Deerfield Beach, Fl.: Health Communications, 1988), vii.

<sup>181</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 182.

<sup>182</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 183.

<sup>183</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 155.

Those who suffer from toxic and chronic shame inhabit a 'wasteland of uncleanness',<sup>184</sup> are 'outcasts from life's feast'<sup>185</sup> and become despised outsiders to themselves and others. Chronic shame is a state that spoils and fundamentally devalues one's identity at its roots, however well this may be disguised.<sup>186</sup>

Children who grow up in shame-bound families are vulnerable to all sorts of dependencies. In shame-bound families, relationships are always in jeopardy and children are confronted with unreachable expectations. Such families give them contradictory signals in the sense that verbal messages and emotions are mismatched ("Don't feel that way! We are a happy family!") which leads to a loss of self and to a blurring of boundaries. Open talk is discouraged, feelings are denied, relationships are detached and disengaged and rules are both rigid and harsh and contradictory (thus bound to be broken). Children growing up in these families come to believe that they are flawed human beings who are unloveable.

A shame-bound family is a family with a self-sustaining, multigenerational system of interaction with a cast of characters who are (or were in their lifetime) loyal to a set of rules and injunctions demanding control, perfectionism, blame and denial. The pattern inhibits or defeats the development of authentic intimate relationships, promotes secrets and vague personal boundaries, unconsciously instills shame in the family members, as well as chaos in their lives, and binds them to perpetuate the shame in themselves and their kin. It does so regardless of the good intentions, wishes, and love which may also part of the system.<sup>187</sup>

'A shame-bound family is a group of people, all of whom feel alone together. To the individuals in the family, shame feels unique and lonely. [...] The shame that feels so peculiar to the self paradoxically is a product not of the

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<sup>184</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 183.

<sup>185</sup> Joyce, James, *Dubliners* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956), 114.

<sup>186</sup> Goffman, Erving, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

<sup>187</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 8.

individual [. . .] but of the system. Within the family secrecy is rampant and relationships are thin and brittle.<sup>188</sup>

Apparently abuse including sexual abuse is rampant in these families, but another observation is even more important: 'Compulsions and addictions are found to cluster in the families of the shame-bound system and in some instances seem to be almost interchangeable with one another.'<sup>189</sup>

Shame is the affect which is the source of many complex and disturbing inner states: depression, alienation, self-doubt, isolating loneliness, paranoid and schizoid phenomena, compulsive disorders, splitting of the self, perfectionism, a deep sense of inferiority, inadequacy or failure, the so-called borderline conditions and disorders of narcissism.<sup>190</sup>

This confirms exactly the findings about addiction displayed in previous chapters.

So why do shame-bound families have this effect on their members?

The effect of trauma has already been discussed. Apart from instances of "soul murder",<sup>191</sup> Alice Miller's notions of "poisonous pedagogy" are helpful in understanding shame-bound families. Miller discovered that many successful and gifted clients had a very fragile sense of self; that behind public success lay feelings of emptiness, self-alienation and meaninglessness. According to her, children in such families were systematically taught to deny and devalue themselves:

These dark feelings will come to the fore as soon as the drug of grandiosity fails, as soon as they are not 'on top', not definitely the 'superstar', or whenever they suddenly get the feeling they failed to live up to some ideal

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<sup>188</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 19.

<sup>189</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 10.

<sup>190</sup> Kaufman, Gershen, *The Psychology of Shame : Theory and Treatment of Shame-Based Syndromes*, 2. ed. (New York: Springer, 1996).

<sup>191</sup> Shengold, Leonard, *Soul Murder : the Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

image they think they must adhere to. Then they are plagued by anxiety or deep feelings of guilt and shame.<sup>192</sup>

Paradoxically, these clients believed that they had had happy childhoods, in spite of there being a 'complete absence of real emotional understanding or serious appreciation of their own childhood vicissitudes, and no conception of their own true needs – beyond the need for achievement. The internalization of the original drama has been so complete that the illusion of a good childhood can be maintained.'<sup>193</sup> In shame-distorted families, shame-producing methods such as duplicity, lying, manipulation, withdrawal of love, isolation, distrust, humiliation and disgrace, ridicule and coercion are used. Children learn false sets of beliefs including:

- a feeling of duty produces love.
- hatred can be dispensed with by forbidding it.
- parents deserve respect because they are parents while children do not deserve respect because they are children.
- obedience makes a child strong while a high degree of self- esteem or pride is harmful.
- low self-esteem makes a person altruistic while tenderness is indulgent and harmful.
- responding to children's needs is wrong whereas severity and coldness are a good preparation for adult life.
- the way you behave is more important than the way you really are.
- the body is dirty and disgusting.
- strong feelings are damaging.

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<sup>192</sup> Miller, Alice, *The Drama of Being a Child : the Search for the True Self* (London: Virago, 1995), 20.

<sup>193</sup> Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*, 20-21.

- parents are free of drive and guilt and are always right.<sup>194</sup>

Poisonous pedagogy lays the foundations of a shame-distorted personality: victims adopt the view of their oppressors, often viewing themselves as well as others with contempt.<sup>195</sup>

Nathanson, strikingly similarly to van der Kolk and his description of trauma victims, suggests that there are four basic defensive scripts against shame.

According to his compass of shame people react with withdrawal, avoidance, by attacking themselves and by attacking others.<sup>196</sup>

Fossum and Mason argue that the rigid control exercised in shame-distorted families and the inevitability of not reaching their standards forces people into a cycle of shame characterised by control and release. Though control and release are natural human rhythms that are encountered in everybody's life, 'when organized and intensified by shame they become intense, out of control, and destructive polarities.'<sup>197</sup>

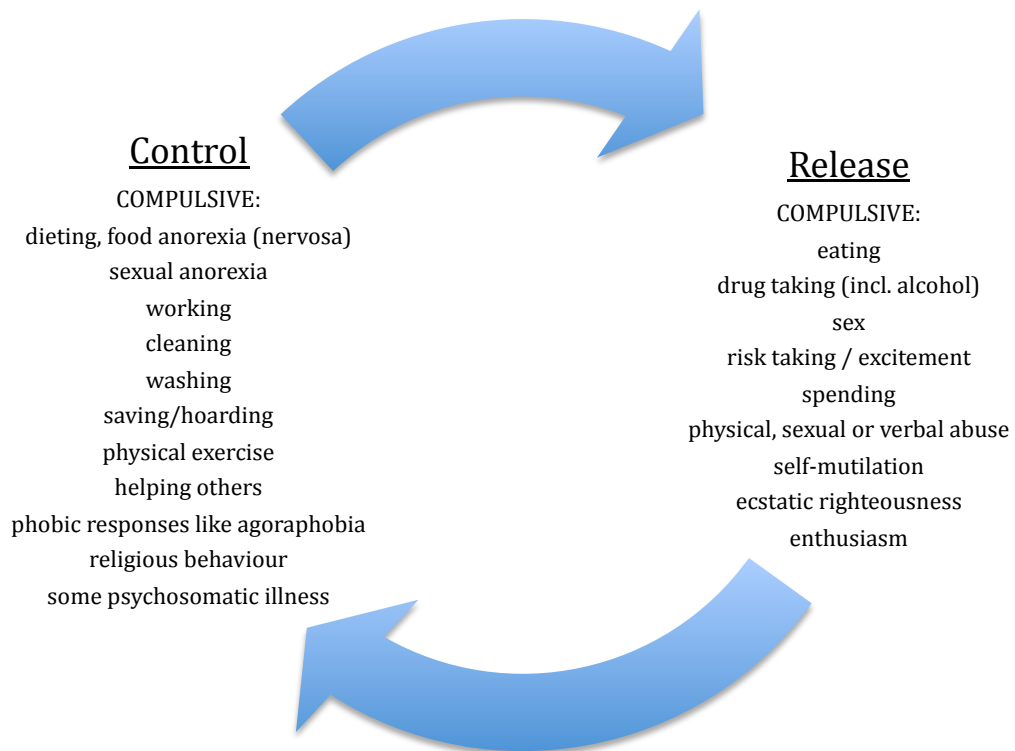
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<sup>194</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 105. Referring to Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*, 59-60.

<sup>195</sup> Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*, 85ff.

<sup>196</sup> Nathanson, Donald L., *Shame and Pride : Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* (New York: Norton, 1992), 303ff.

<sup>197</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 14.

Figure 5 The Shame-bound Cycle<sup>198</sup>

Whether compulsive working or self-mutilation is classified as control or release behaviours seems to be controversial. Lechler<sup>199</sup> in particular adds a very large number of other behaviours which can be addictively abused. Kaufman identifies eight classes of syndromes organized around shame, presenting a very similar list of syndromes.<sup>200</sup>

Growing up in a shame-bound family may have exactly the same effect on individuals as traumatic events in creating the addictive process. The trauma of

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<sup>198</sup> compiled from Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, 98; Carnes and Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia*, 56-57; Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 107.

<sup>199</sup> Lechler, *Nicht die Droge ist's*.

<sup>200</sup> Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame*, 119ff.



sexual abuse may be prolonged or a single incident, but the prolonged exposure to a shame-bound family causes similar damage, whether specifically sexual abuse is present or not. This implies that the previous picture of addiction as disguised trauma repetition is too narrow.

#### **4.8.2 Outcomes**

It has been shown conclusively that trauma causes the specific vulnerability to addiction labelled as the addictive process. Apparently the prolonged trauma of growing up in a shame-based family has precisely the same effect and can lead to the same kinds of addictive behaviours.

Addictive behaviours are therefore not only functioning as ways of repeating trauma offering the illusion of control and temporary affect regulation, but such behaviours can function as a distraction from the burdensome consequences of selfhood, such as shame.

Roy Baumeister has written extensively about apparently disconnected behaviours like alcoholism, spirituality and masochism, which have the potential to offer a temporary release from the burden of selfhood.<sup>201</sup> This may be as simple as a positive stress release caused by a specific situation. Escape behaviours serve 'the function of narrowing the perceptual field to concrete events and refocusing the

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<sup>201</sup> Baumeister, *Masochism and the Self*; Baumeister, *Escaping the Self*.

attention away from distressing cognition and affect.'<sup>202</sup> These practices are 'designed to thwart, unmake, and obliterate the self, at least temporarily.'<sup>203</sup>

The core belief of shame-distorted individuals is that they are basically a bad and unworthy person.<sup>204</sup> If identity is perceived as a painful prison, tension-reducing behaviours like those mentioned in the shame cycle offer release from the pain of feeling and cognition of being unworthy, bad, inadequate and wrong. This escape is both numbing and pleasurable and, in a similar way to trauma repetitions, can become addictive.

Tragically, addiction is not only fuelled by despair but creates despair. Addicts who try to escape negative affects through acting out sexually always end up in greater pain, as the consequences of their behaviour add to their distress. Addiction causes a variety of distress: internal pain such as the violation of one's own moral standards, or external pain such as losing one's job following the downloading of pornography. Internally, addiction causes both guilt and shame. Experiencing impaired control over a behaviour and violating one's personal values by engaging in this behaviour causes more shame than guilt: if I do this repeatedly without being able to stop, I have to be a bad person.

As both trauma and shame have the effect of damaging an individual to the extent that one becomes vulnerable to addictive behaviours, Thaddeus Birchard used a slightly wider concept which encompasses the effects of shame and trauma: narcissistic damage or narcissistic personality disorder. Birchard went as far as

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<sup>202</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 578.

<sup>203</sup> Baumeister, *Escaping the Self*, ix.

<sup>204</sup> Carnes and Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia*, 56.

equalising the addictive process with narcissistic damage as the core issue responsible for all sorts of addictions and compulsive behaviours. However, it has been suggested that this is mainly a question of labelling, as narcissistic personality disorder may be related to (or even the same as) defences against shame<sup>205</sup> and nothing but a part of the plethora of behavioural responses and personality traits connected with the corrosive effects of shame.

According to Birchard, addiction is a 'response to the pain and distress of narcissistic damage', which is the 'outcome of a disturbance in attachment'.<sup>206</sup>

According to DSM-III, narcissistic damage is described as 'enduring affect, cognitive, behavioural and relational patterns laid down in the formation of the self and carried into adult functioning that are inflexible, maladaptive, and cause either significant impairment or subjective distress.'<sup>207</sup> Effects of narcissistic damage include emptiness and loneliness, grandiosity, feeling inferior, compulsion to control, boredom, over dependence on admiration, striving for wealth, brilliance or power, envy and defences against envy, as well as dissatisfaction with the self.<sup>208</sup>

Sexual addiction is a self-medication used to numb the pain stemming from narcissistic damage, which expresses itself particularly in a heightened sense of shame, which is felt as an 'inner torment, as a wound from the inside dividing us

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<sup>205</sup> Morrison, Andrew P., *Shame : the Underside of Narcissism* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1989); Wurmser, 'Shame.'; Wurmser, Leon, 'Trauma, Shame Conflicts, and Affect Regression : Discussion of "Wounded but still Walking"', *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>206</sup> Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World,' 2.

<sup>207</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 298.

<sup>208</sup> Kernberg, Otto F., 'Factors in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personalities,' in *Essential Papers in Narcissism*, ed. Andrew P. Morrison (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*.

from ourselves.’<sup>209</sup> This primary shame caused by narcissistic damage results in and heightens the distress of negative affect states like depression, loneliness, fear, stress, anxiety, boredom, loss, physical pain, abandonment and engulfment.

Additionally, the addictive behaviour itself results in acute shame and feelings of guilt, leaving the addict feeling even more inferior and ashamed of what they are.

At the core of addiction is a self-enforcing cycle of shame.

In short: addiction is the habitual self-medication of narcissistic damage caused by shame and/or trauma.

#### **4.9 Treatment and Recovery**

Eventually the habitual behavioural manifestations of addiction cause an increasing amount of pain. The addict is confronted with powerlessness and unmanageability and has to confront the illusions of the addictive lifestyle.

There is almost no empirical data about success rates of treatment and about those reaching stable long-term sobriety.<sup>210</sup> Those who are entering recovery are first trying to abstain from destructive behaviours and to establish some form of sobriety. For this symptom relief, pharmacological intervention may be helpful, although the data about its efficacy is sparse and contradictory.<sup>211</sup> The addictive behaviour develops a dynamic of its own and is difficult to stop. However, without addressing the underlying addictive process, addicts will be unable to stay stopped

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<sup>209</sup> Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World,' 2.

<sup>210</sup> Gold and Heffner, 'Sexual Addiction,' 376-79.

<sup>211</sup> Sealy, John R., 'Psychopharmacologic Intervention in Addictive Sexual Behavior,' in *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, ed. Patrick Carnes and Kenneth M. Adams (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

reliably. There is no medication able to achieve that and it is not possible to *make* this happen; it also cannot happen in a short period of time. What seems to be effective is group therapy and 12 step fellowships.<sup>212</sup>

The theoretical explorations above explain why recovery from sexual addiction has to go way beyond symptomatic treatment and why it has to involve first order and second order changes.<sup>213</sup> Those recovering from sexual addiction need to address both the habitual behaviours as well as the underlying addictive process. As shame and stigma are conferred by human beings, the undoing of that damage has to involve other human beings who offer acceptance and valuing. What is needed in recovery is, following Martin Buber, a healing “I and Thou” relationship, the building of an “interpersonal bridge”.<sup>214</sup>

The goal of recovery is to gain control over one’s current life, rather than attempting to medicate damage from the past by repeating it and harming oneself and others further in doing so. In contrast to alcoholism, the goal is not necessarily abstinence i.e. celibacy, but self-control, which involves abstinence from behaviours that are addictive for the individual, but also the continuation of behaviours which may have previously been used addictively (e.g. genital sexuality in a marriage). This makes it difficult for sex addicts to define what sobriety means for them. Hence 12 step fellowships disagree what sobriety means for their clientele. Sexaholics Anonymous has a common bottom line restricting genital

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<sup>212</sup> Carnes, Patrick J. and Kenneth M. Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

<sup>213</sup> Watzlawick, Paul et al., *Change : Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution* (New York: Norton, 1974).

<sup>214</sup> Erikson, Erik H., *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1993).

sexuality to heterosexual marriage and not accepting masturbation. Sexual Recovery Anonymous restricts genital sexuality to stable relationships. However, this does not exclude a whole range of other behaviours recognised as part of addictive cycles that need to be abstained from. The other fellowships like Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous or Sexual Compulsives Anonymous do not have common abstinence definitions but entrust individuals (together with their sponsors) to identify the behaviours from which one has to remain abstinent.

The second difference from addictions like alcoholism is that sex addiction uses a very powerful natural human drive addictively. There is no human drive to drink alcohol, hence abstinence is not as difficult. This is different for sexuality. The drive to express oneself sexually is very strong, and complete abstinence is not a desirable goal for those who live in intimate and sexual relationships. However, for those who have been recovering for a longer period of time two common features are apparent: For all of them recovery means that genital sexuality has to become optional and has to develop into a means of enhancing intimacy. For some, this means to live without genital sexuality – but they would claim that their sexuality has been vastly developed and enhanced in recovery, to say nothing of all the other areas of their lives.

The danger for all recovering from addiction is of stopping only the most damaging addictive behaviour but carrying on other addiction behaviours that have been masked by the dominant behaviour. As an example, it is common to stop drinking and to become sober from alcohol whilst continuing (and increasing!) to act out sexually – without noticing for a long time that this is not recovery. The theory of

addiction cycles explains why people in recovery can get stuck in the control or release part of their cycle and continue to act out damaging behaviours, in spite of being abstinent from one part of their cycle. In 12 step language, the danger is to become a “dry drunk”, somebody who continues to be preoccupied and obsessive about alcohol in spite of being abstinent.

To formulate it positively, the process of “hitting bottom”, of facing powerlessness and unmanageability, of abstinence from destructive behaviour, of facing shame in the present and the past, of stopping the denial of double lives offers the opportunity for change and growth. Kaufman unintentionally includes this in his definition of shame:

Shame itself is an entrance to the self. It is the affect of indignity, of defeat, or transgression, of inferiority, and of alienation. No other affect is closer to the experienced self. None is more central to the sense of identity. Shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It is the most poignant experience of the self by the self, whether felt in the humiliation of cowardice, or in the sense of failure to cope successfully with a challenge. Shame is a wound felt from the inside, dividing us both from ourselves and from one another.<sup>215</sup>

In the sense of offering an entrance to the self, the “gift of addiction” is the opportunity to find ‘lost parts of oneself by abstaining from compulsive re-enactments and reconstructing the vulnerable self.’<sup>216</sup> This long journey of recovery and leaving the shame-bound cycle seems to be a spiritual journey for those involved. Spirituality in the sense of ‘the natural, animating life force’,<sup>217</sup> or the reliance on a power outside oneself, seems to be a crucial part of this journey.

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<sup>215</sup> Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame*, ix-x.

<sup>216</sup> Schwartz, 'Developmental Psychopathological Perspectives,' 579.

<sup>217</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 159.

‘Shame erodes the spirit’<sup>218</sup> and recovery from shame involves the recovery of a spiritual dimension, of finding the ability to trust in life.<sup>219</sup>

Goodman defined as part of the addictive process ‘a tendency to depend on external action to cope with the effects of impaired self-regulation.’<sup>220</sup> Recovery involves reversing the alienation of the self from the self caused by shaming: ‘Toxic shame looks to the outside for happiness and for validation, since the inside is flawed and defective. Toxic shame is spiritual bankruptcy.’<sup>221</sup> Recovery means to find the kingdom of heaven within oneself again (Luke 17:21).

Like any crisis, recovery from addiction offers individuals the opportunity to find themselves through their addiction – our failures offer us a way to ourselves, to grow and to become truly human. Jean V., a recovering sex addict puts it succinctly:

Throughout, my Twelve Step recovery network – both friends and groups – has given me support while Twelve Step principles have kept me focussed on the journey of personal healing and growth to which we addicts are uniquely privileged. [...] Long ago I was preoccupied with what I had to give up in recovery. Gradually I became aware of what I was receiving in recovery. My energy has progressively shifted toward personal growth with its tremendous rewards. Recovery – broadly defined as personal healing and integration – has become increasingly exhilarating and pursuit of this quest is one of life’s greatest joys.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 159.

<sup>219</sup> Miller, William R., *Integrating Spirituality into Treatment : Resources for Practitioners* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999); Ringwald, Christopher D., *The Soul of Recovery : Uncovering the Spiritual Dimension in the Treatment of Addictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Swinton, John, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care : Rediscovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension* (London: J. Kingsley Publishers, 2001).

<sup>220</sup> Goodman, *Sexual Addiction : an Integrated Approach*, 160.

<sup>221</sup> Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, 23.

<sup>222</sup> V., Jean, *Sexuality in Perspective*, 3. ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Serenity Publishing House, 2007), 192.



## 4.10 Conclusion

### 4.10.1 Sexual Addiction

In summary, a number of writers agree that sexual addiction – like any addiction – is a form of self-medication offering release from the effects of an underlying pathology independent from the addiction. This underlying pathology has been identified as narcissistic damage caused by shame or other traumatic incidents, mostly during the time of childhood. As lovemaps become cemented during adolescence, problematic arousal patterns are likely to remain: recovery has to involve abstinence from behaviours which are unproblematic for healthy individuals but are able to trigger further addictive behaviours for addicts.

The basic assumption about the twofold nature of addiction made by Goodman in 1990 seems to be accurate and supported by psychotherapeutic and neurobiological as well as clinical evidence:

Addictive disorders would be most accurately described, not as a variety of addictions, but as a basic underlying addictive process, which may be expressed in one or more of various behavioral manifestations.<sup>223</sup>

A general theory of addiction can therefore be schematised as follows:

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<sup>223</sup> Goodman, Aviel, 'Addiction : Definition and Implications,' *British Journal of Addiction* 85, no. 11 (1990).

**Figure 6 General Addiction Theory**

The difference between sexual addiction and other forms of addiction seems to be that the damage causing the addictive process had a component that sexualised the problem. If somebody has been subject to sexual abuse it is likely that the behavioural addictive manifestations will include sexual behaviours, consisting of disguised repetitions of trauma and/or of behaviours offering a relief from the painful burden of the shame-disturbed self.

This does not exclude a range of other behaviours being part of someone's addictive cycle, or in fact the ability to replace one addiction with another if a particular behaviour becomes impossible to continue e.g. by it becoming just too costly (somebody has been arrested for the use of child pornography and "white-knuckles" to stop this behaviour, but continues to use non-criminal forms of pornography), or by it becoming inaccessible (someone cannot act out with prostitutes while being imprisoned and turns to substance abuse).

**Figure 7 Sexual Addiction Theory**

#### 4.10.2 Personality Traits

One defining feature of shame is that it is associated with hiding. The worst fear of the shamed person is exposure, the worst fear of sex addicts is of all their behaviours becoming public knowledge.

He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world. Instead he must wish for his own invisibility.<sup>224</sup>

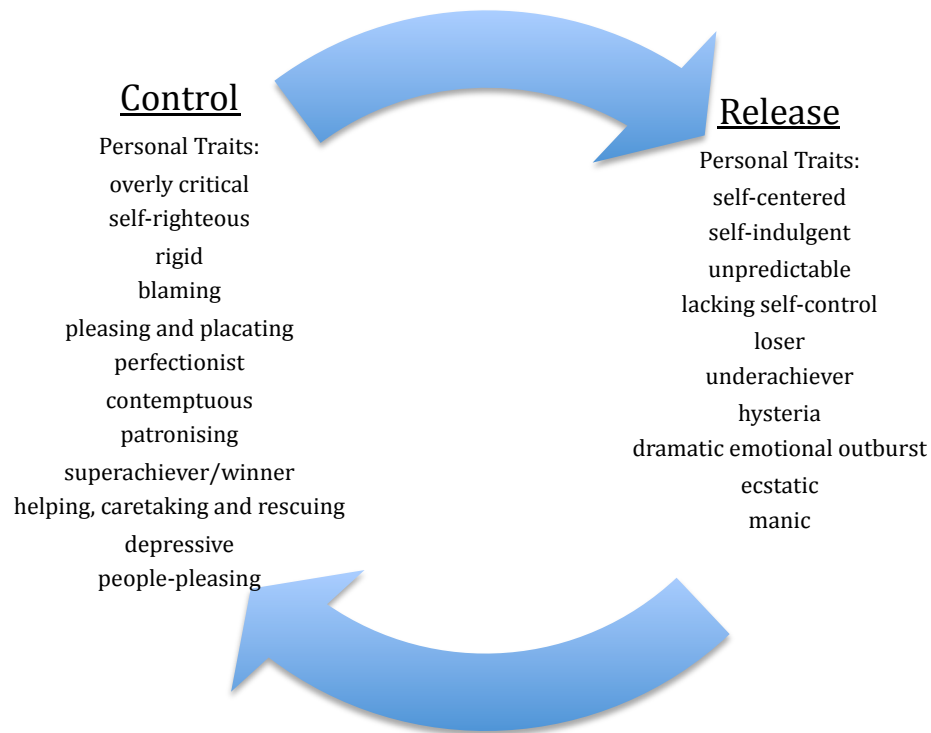
Shame is like a subatomic particle. One's knowledge of shame is often limited to the trace it leaves.<sup>225</sup>

Shame is not directly visible, but exists as the underlying pathology and vulnerability to addiction and other behaviours only recognisable in these behaviours and in certain personality traits. Fossum and Mason, Carnes and Bradshaw connect a number of personal traits with the two sides of the shame cycle:

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<sup>224</sup> Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 244.

<sup>225</sup> Lewis, Michael Jan, *Shame : the Exposed Self* (New York: Free Press et al., 1992), 34.

Figure 8 Personal Traits<sup>226</sup>

These are extremely similar to the personality traits connected with narcissistic damage listed by Kernberg<sup>227</sup> and Miller.<sup>228</sup> DSM-IV applies more or less the same diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder as a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (either in fantasy or actual behaviour), need for admiration, and lack of empathy that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of situations and environments.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>226</sup> Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, 98; Carnes and Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia*, 56-57; Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 14.

<sup>227</sup> Kernberg, 'Factors in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personalities.'

<sup>228</sup> Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*.

<sup>229</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-IV*.

These different personal traits connected to the control and release parts of the shame cycle will be central to the theological interpretation of addiction explored below.

### **4.10.3 Further Outcomes**

The discoveries of addiction studies in the past years show that sex addiction is to some extent not about sex; it is a form of self-medication stemming from an underlying problem which has a sexual aspect. This underlying problem is the connection between seemingly disconnected symptoms and syndromes. Treating sex addiction as a purely sexual problem with the single goal of stopping a particular behaviour is bound to fail. This also makes apparent that a moralistic approach is counterproductive. The “moral model” is as inappropriate for sex addiction as it has been for alcoholism. A solely moralistic approach or punishment to the behavioural expressions of sex addiction may be followed by the cessation of a particular behaviour, but will do nothing to change the underlying pathology and will simply force the addict to move to another part of the control-release cycle or to replace one addiction with another. As addicts are shame-distorted individuals a moralistic approach is likely to worsen the underlying problem. Precisely stemming from their wounded sexuality they usually have a heightened sense of shame in all matters sexual and most of them will probably profess very conservative moral convictions – which are part of their cycles of control and release.

Secondly, the outlined theoretical approach makes it very difficult to find a clear boundary between what is normal or healthy and what is abnormal and

pathologic. There are cases with a clear consensus that addiction is present and others where the necessarily fuzzy boundaries make a clear diagnosis impossible. Finally, there is nobody alive who does not suffer some form of damage through shame. Whether individuals are vulnerable to addiction is not answerable with yes or no, but presents a continuum ranging from highly likely to unlikely. All human beings are vulnerable to engaging in control and release behaviours to regulate their affects. For some, these behaviours become compulsive.

## **5 Introducing Theology: speaking theologically about Sex, Sin and Shame**

### **5.1 Introduction**

I find the evidence convincing that suggests that underlying sex addiction is an addictive process identified as narcissistic damage and the outgrowth of shaming. At the heart of my hypothesis is the idea that a theological view of this addictive process offers a more adequate understanding of sexual addiction than a purely secular understanding can. The language of sin may sound anachronistic in trying to understand shame-bound people, and the question whether theology has something to offer to this discourse apart from more shaming is obvious and perfectly justified. The relationship between Christianity, sexuality and shame is deeply ambiguous.

In the following chapter I will give a brief overview of the Christian view of human sexuality and of its view of shame. There is a vast body of literature exploring this and out of necessity this chapter has to be brief. It is therefore inevitable that the given account will have gaps.

### **5.2 Sexual Morality**

#### **5.2.1 Sexuality and the Bible**

Nothing is more controversial among Christians than Bible reading. The far too often used phrase 'The Bible says...' does not usually go in hand with statements

about whether the person making this assertion consults what she accepts as denominational tradition, natural reason or mystical vision. No statement is made as to whether one is aware of the interpretative act of translating ancient texts or whether one considers it possible to interpret a snippet of biblical text just by itself, or whether snippets need to be subordinate to the reading of the whole book or indeed the whole collection of books. The controversy around how the Bible is read is as old as Christianity itself, and it is obvious that different methods lead to different results. Particularly in the area of sexual ethics, discussions get very complicated due to the motives and cognitive interest of every person taking part. Additionally, the stories about Jesus in the canonical gospels are full of very sharp criticisms like 'you are like whitewashed tombs, outside splendid to the eye, but inside full of the bones of the dead, and every uncleanness' (Matthew 23:27), that mirror the language of current discussions about sexual morality.

It is misleading to speak of biblical ethics or biblical morality since the New Testament in particular does not offer a comprehensive code for daily behaviour, including sexual behaviour. Moreover, the different genres of the New Testament do not always agree about the moral points they do address. It is impossible to build an ethic of sexual behaviour on the radical injunctions of the gospel ('Make yourselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God' Matt 19:12) which seem to require a complete rejection of sex, without allegorising or ignoring these statements, whereas Paul seems to give far more particular counsels. In the Christian Bible one discovers 'not so much a series of norms about sex, as a series of asides and a larger silence'.<sup>230</sup> However, this point is exactly part of the reason for the authority

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<sup>230</sup> Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 44.



of these texts. The wide space for interpretative creativity that biblical texts offer enable discourse, development and re-interpretation. Christian communities can find new things in the scriptures about sexual ethics; in other words: the Bible enables Christians to say new things about sexuality. This is one way to justify that these texts function as perennial topics within the discourse about human sexuality. Neither tradition nor scripture present a simple and cohesive picture.

#### **5.2.1.1 *Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible***

Israel placed a high value on its distinctive traditions, on all that distinguished it from other nations (i.e. the Gentiles). Among these were – to name a few obvious examples - the rejection of images in worship, their monotheism, the observance of the Sabbath, the purity code, their practice of circumcision and their reluctance to intermarry with Gentiles. The Torah, as the basic law of Israel in all respects, was intensely concerned with purity as one of the principal forces keeping Israel separate. Scattered individual rules are found in most of the Pentateuch, but the two main collections are found in Leviticus 11-16 and 17-26. The first collection is primarily concerned with uncleanness, which calls for some rite of purification, whereas the second (usually called the 'Holiness Code') deals with the consequences of uncleanness for the people at large. William Countryman,<sup>231</sup> following the ground-breaking study of Mary Douglas identifying purity rules as 'a positive effort to organise the environment',<sup>232</sup> states that God's holiness means

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<sup>231</sup> cf. Countryman, Louis William, *Dirt, Greed and Sex : Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 20-45.

<sup>232</sup> Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger : an Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

wholeness and completeness, not only in God, but also in God's creation. A Levite may not officiate as a priest if he suffers from any blemish, 'a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles' (Lev 21:18-20). Implicit in the purity system is an ideal of what a whole and complete man, woman, water animal or land animal should be. If a land animal does not match this general ideal, it is considered unclean. Land animals should be ruminants with cloven hoofs; ox, sheep and goats are clean, pigs and camels are not. A whole and complete being should be of a single identity. This makes it understandable why leprosy renders a person unclean, unless 'the leprosy covers all the skin of the diseased person from head to foot', 'if the leprosy covers all his body he shall pronounce him clean' (Lev 13, 12-13). The disease itself is not the problem, but the mixed condition of its victim. The shaping principles of the purity code are the wholeness and completeness of the kind in its individual exemplar and the prohibition of mixing kinds.

The dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance, holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal. Observance of the dietary rules would thus have been a meaningful part of the great liturgical act of recognition and worship which culminated in the sacrifice in the Temple.<sup>233</sup>

Countryman makes a very convincing case that most of the sexual ethics of the Hebrew Bible are purity concerns. All sexual and quasi-sexual emissions defile and require ritual cleansing. The prohibitions against homosexual acts, cross-dressing

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<sup>233</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger : an Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo.*, 71.

and bestiality follow the purity principles stated above. Prostitution is a purity offence since it is an aspect of rejected cults. Adultery is mainly an offence against sexual property and has similar reasons for being rejected as incest, which disrupts the family hierarchy.

#### **5.2.1.2 *Sexuality in the New Testament***

In short, the New Testament adjusts the Purity Code but maintains the property ethic. The canonical gospels teach that the family should be subordinate to the reign of God (cf Matt. 8:22, Matt. 10:37) and that this-worldly obligations should not rival the demands of discipleship. Jesus specifically demanded that the wife should no longer be regarded as disposable (i.e. divorceable) property (Matt 19:9). Husband and wife are understood as human equals who constitute one flesh and thus become the property of each other. Jesus presented children as the model citizens for the kingdom of God, not the father. Thus he undercut the role of the patriarch and totally undermined the hierarchy of the family.

Jesus retained the prohibition against adultery but not its punishment. However, Jesus redefined adultery so that its principal form now would be the divorcing of one spouse and marrying another – a perfectly respectable and legal undertaking by the standards of the time. Adultery thus became no longer the exceptional behaviour of an evil few, but the normal behaviour of society at large. The focus of the vice was no longer the actual act, but the intention of committing it (Matt 5:27-28). The essence of this lies in covetousness, in the intent to possess what belongs to another. Adultery is a form of robbery, depriving husband or wife (!) of what belongs to them.

### 5.2.2 Traditional Christian Ethics

The original Christian ideal for sex was that of its absence: of a new life beyond it. Some passages from the New Testament were read as comparisons between the biological family and the true and higher family of the Christian community. Denigrations of married life constitute a regular genre of Christian literature (e.g. Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate*<sup>234</sup>). Many of those texts are nowadays judged extreme, but even in texts that everybody would count central, one finds similar attacks on the family in favour of celibacy. Augustine tells his conversion as in part a fulfilment of his mother Monica's prayers, in part a full reunion with her in Christian community. But Augustine's conversion to Christianity is centrally an embrace of celibacy, thus a final rejection of Monica's schemes for a proper marriage for her son. Augustine did not construe from his conversion experience a general rule for celibacy after baptism, but some ancient churches did have such a rule (for example the Encratite community).<sup>235</sup> The high ideal of celibacy, or rather virginity, shows why the Virgin Martyr is such a prominent and potent sexual identity: a huge number of female saints, particularly those who are or were most popular, fall into this category. It is striking that there is really no alternative ideal in the early church for Christian living. The early Christians used sexual ethics to

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<sup>234</sup> Gregory, *Über das Wesen des christlichen Bekenntnisses. Über die Vollkommenheit. Über die Jungfräulichkeit*, ed. Wilhelm Blum, *Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1977).

<sup>235</sup> 'Encyclopædia Britannica: Encratite', <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/186589/Encratites> (26 November 2010).

set themselves apart from pagan society and for most of Christian history ‘heresy implies sexual deviance and sexual deviance implies heresy.’<sup>236</sup>

As the Virgin Martyr was the ideal of Christian living, the anti-identity that developed was that of the Sodomite. Every common definition of that identity is probably too narrow: by one author or another every erotic act that can be performed by human bodies except penile-vaginal intercourse between two partners who are not primarily seeking pleasure and who do not intend to prevent conception has been condemned as sin against nature, or sodomy. Within this identity those sins particularly dangerous for male celibate clergy gained a special focus: homosexuality, masturbation and sex outside marriage.

Approaching Christian marriage through the ideal of virginity makes it clear that marriage was constructed as the only place left for sex. Marriage shelters some sexual activity from an otherwise total rejection of sexual pleasure. As with the identity of the Virgin Martyr, the identity of the Christian husband or wife is very fragile. Both identities are anti-erotic, since marriage contains lust in order to extinguish it (1Cor 7:2). Room for sex in Christian marriage is both small and temporary. The modern association of Christianity with “family values” is in itself a result of a remarkable change in the valuation of virginity. It is however extremely revealing to see the ideal of virginity as formative in our understanding of ideals of married life.

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<sup>236</sup> Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 72.

**5.2.3 Reconstruction of Sexual Ethics**

The discovery that scriptural texts are open to interpretations which do not necessarily back the classic sexual identities of Virgin Martyr and Sodomite, or even less the fairly modern concept of “family values”, led to attempts to reconstruct a Christian ethic which is more apt for dealing with the demands of modern society.

As one example of many, William Countryman derives from his biblical studies six principles that should rule sexual ethics:<sup>237</sup>

a. Membership in the Christian community is in no way limited by purity codes.

The creation of the purity code within the church is for Countryman one of the ways in which the church has allowed itself to become a barrier to the gospel of God's grace. The gospel allows no rule against masturbation, non-vaginal heterosexual intercourse, bestiality, polygamy, homosexual acts or erotic art and literature. Christians may exercise their own purity rules, but have no right to impose their own codes on others. Sexual acts ‘may be genuinely wrong where they involve an offence against the property of another,<sup>238</sup> denial of the equality of women and men, or an idolatrous substitution of sex for the reign of God as the goal of human existence’,<sup>239</sup> but there is no biblical reason to denounce any of the above sexual acts for reasons of purity.

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<sup>237</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 223.

<sup>238</sup> Adultery is not a purity offence, but in this sense an offence against the “property” of another.

<sup>239</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 224.

b. Christians must respect the sexual property of others and practise detachment from their own.

Property is not something confined to material possessions, but a 'personal realm in which one can act in obedience to the reign of God; it is [...] all that pertains or "is proper to" each person.'<sup>240</sup> 'Property is the wherewithal of being human in this age – which can also become, by grace, the wherewithal of becoming a fit citizen of the age to come.'<sup>241</sup> Property must include sustenance, space, the means to grow, the community of other humans and some freedom of choice. The most obvious sexual property violation is rape. But violation of sexual property can take not only the form of physical violence, but also of social, emotional and psychological violence: sexual harassment, manipulative pressures in relationships or sexual impositions by trusted authorities. An ethic consistent with the gospel will not only protect the property of individuals, but also that of groups like women or homosexual people.

c. Where, in late antiquity, sexual property belonged to the family through the agency of the male householder, in our own era it belongs to the individual.

Since biblical society was family-structured an individual was only an expression of her family. The reason for a man to enter a marriage was a combination of sexual satisfaction, household labour and legitimate heirs. Only the first was specific to him, the rest benefited his family. Adultery in ancient terms meant theft in sexual matters since a man stole the womb and the family resources of another

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<sup>240</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 227.

<sup>241</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 228.

man and used them for the nourishment of his own seed, depriving the family of another man of legitimate heirs. In modern society adultery is still viewed as wrong due to a betrayal of trust – that is, theft of an interior good. In modern marriage, the heart of sexual property lies in interior goods. The most common form of adultery in modern society is therefore not ‘adultery with another person, but the purely self-regarding adultery which demands of the partner the full range of goods associated with sexual property but gives few or none of them in return.’<sup>242</sup> In our society we have a prevalence of adultery in the form of profiteering, the use of sexual relationships for one's own physical, emotional, economic or psychological satisfaction without regard for one's partner. Countryman shows that an individual property ethic can be used to make statements about child abuse, incest, abortion and contraception.

d. The gospel can discern no inequality between men and women as they stand before God's grace.

Although the gospel called for a total demolition of the ancient family structure, the writers of the New Testament tried to accommodate the Christian gospel to existing patterns of society and accepted a great deal of inequality between the sexes in everyday life. Paul did not consider it worthwhile to challenge the rules of society too much due to his parousial imminentism. The equality of women and men was only achieved in celibacy.

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<sup>242</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 234.



e. Marriage creates a union of flesh, normally indissoluble except by death.

The property relationship of ancient marriages was easy enough to convey: the first sexual intercourse with its accompanying proof of virginity showed that the new wife was the property of the husband's family. Since the property relationship of modern marriage is largely interior, it is far more difficult to achieve and to convey successfully. The goods are not simply brought to the marriage, but need to be developed within a relationship. Thus a specific date is impossible to fix and one need to accept that a large number of marriages, in spite of efforts and performed ceremonies, are in fact not sacramental marriages. Blessings of marriage in church should not mark the beginning of a relationship but a successful establishment of a relationship after several years. Marriage in this sense of property relationship is not restricted to the conception of children or to people of different sex: homosexuals are fully capable of giving one another the interior goods demanded by marriage in our time.

f. The Christian's sexual life and property are always subordinate to the reign of God.

Sex is not wrong in itself, but like knowledge, wisdom, money, power, security, success or even oneself, it cannot be central. Those things become wrong if they become ultimate goals. This makes libertinism morally wrong, since it makes sexual fulfilment an overarching goal of life. These considerations condemn any pursuit of sexual pleasure based on megalomania and idolatry.

#### 5.2.4 Conclusion

I have spent considerable space on Countryman's deconstruction of the traditional biblical understanding, as it is widely recognised as classic. The major criticism about Countryman's approach is that he spends only a fraction of his book on the reconstruction of a Christian ethic for modern times. Other writers consider his approach to be not radical enough, since he does not see the crisis of sexuality located in social relations and the eroticising of racism, sexism and other injustices. Ellison<sup>243</sup> claims that the underlying theme of justice in the scriptures needs to be considered superior to all individual snippets of scripture which state something different. Theological discourse about sexuality should no longer be located in the past, in a tradition defined by patriarchal authority. It should be neither abstract, ahistorical and largely deductive, but those at the centre of any discourse should be those who suffer from sexual injustice: gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and transgender persons of all races and colours. In contrast to a libertine minimalist ethic, justice requires a total re-evaluation of all sexual relationships.<sup>244</sup> The focus shifts again if human sexuality is viewed from the perspective of children: their need for protection, attachment and stability makes a very strong case for the importance of chastity, fidelity and stable families.

There is a growing amount of literature that applies the "Option for the Poor" developed by Liberation Theology to sexual minorities, women and children and

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<sup>243</sup> Ellison, Marvin Mahan, *Erotic Justice : a Liberating Ethic of Sexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

<sup>244</sup> Ellison, *Erotic Justice*, 61.

tries to develop a Christian sexual ethic from this starting point, but it goes beyond the scope of this paper to outline these developments as well.<sup>245</sup>

Very slowly, the transition is made from viewing sexuality as something to be redeemed from towards embracing it as a means of grace.

#### 5.2.5 Outcomes

Christian Ethics describe how human relationships should be organised to be a foretaste of God's kingdom; how human beings should live in accordance with God's will. Currently, there is a very wide ranging discussion within the Christian community about what kinds of sexual relationships Christians should consider to be blessed and a means of God's grace (and should therefore encourage and affirm) and which they should consider to be morally reprobate.

Apart from defining what form of behaviour is morally ideal, acceptable, less than ideal or sinful, the discourse does not seem to focus on the question of why human sexuality is particularly vulnerable, how this is transmitted and why this is serious. The discussion about human sexuality, even within the Christian church, seems mostly a moralistic and individualistic one, apparently based purely upon free decision and arbitrary choice. It is the goal of the next chapter to show that this is simplistic and disregards the church's doctrinal teaching. More importantly, such a discourse is bound to fail to take the dark side of sexuality seriously enough.

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<sup>245</sup> e.g. Davies, Jon and Gerard Loughlin, *Sex these Days : Essays on Theology, Sexuality and Society, Studies in Theology and Sexuality 1* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Dominian, Jack, *Let's make Love : the Meaning of Sexual Intercourse* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001); Thatcher, Adrian, 'Norms, Rules and Steadfast Love: Towards an Inclusive Theology of Intimacy,' *Theology & sexuality: the journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality* 9, no. 2 (2003).

Simply discussing which choices people should make to live lives ready for God's kingdom is not going to help those who experience their sexuality as out of control: if it is a matter of choice, it confirms the core conviction of those who experience powerlessness about their sexual behaviour that they are basically bad and unworthy persons. The majority of the moralistic discourse about human sexuality within the church adds shame to already shame-disturbed people. Engaging in a moral discourse without taking seriously the nature of Sin amounts to being unfaithful to the gospel.

### 5.3 Sin

#### 5.3.1 Introduction

Jordan's statement that the biblical view of sexuality is 'not so much a series of norms about sex, as a series of asides and a larger silence'<sup>246</sup> is of utmost importance for a theological conversation about sexuality. Both the Old and the New Testament speak of sexuality not as a separate entity, but in connection with obedience to God, idolatry and worship. This is a very important point to make.

The term sin has become virtually unuseable in past years. In secular society, the term has been trivialized and usually refers to temptations and indulgencies of a minor kind; like eating too much chocolate. Ice-cream commercials actually use religious terminology to enhance the appeal of the product.

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<sup>246</sup> Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 44.

The term has disappeared from serious public discourse. Usually, if used at all, it is an anachronistic term to refer to matters of personal morality: sins, not Sin. Even in religious circles the term has become widely out of use. Sin-talk has an unpleasant feeling to it: the suspicion that this is the language of blame and condemnation, usually in matters sexual (which is exactly the sense in which the term is used in some religious enclaves).

To use the term in connection with addiction or compulsion is particularly controversial, since a lot of campaigning and education about addiction has been about showing that addicts are not immoral and of weak character, but driven to actions against their moral standards. Currently the cluster of human problems commonly known as addiction is either described as 'a failure of willpower and morality or as disease'.<sup>247</sup> There has been a shift in terminology: behaviour which was once called sin is often today called addiction. 'In reaction against a doctrine of sin perceived as moralistic, judgemental and counterproductive, there has been a shift towards describing more human problems as medical.'<sup>248</sup>

Sin in Christian theology has been defined very differently. Within the confines of this study I will look at an Augustinian understanding of sin as interpreted by Alistair McFadyen,<sup>249</sup> which seems to be particularly helpful in interpreting addiction and shame.

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<sup>247</sup> Mercadante, Linda A., *Victims and Sinners : Spiritual Roots of Addiction and Recovery* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>248</sup> Mercadante, *Victims and Sinners*, 5.

<sup>249</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*.

### 5.3.2 Sin, sinful Actions and Original Sin

Alistair McFadyen shows in his analysis of Augustine's theology that any understanding of sin purely in categories of free decision and arbitrary choice is too simplistic to understand phenomena such as the Holocaust or child abuse. Interestingly, he describes the difference between sin and holiness in the categories of idolatry and worship. Worship 'is actively to orientate and order one's life, whether more or less explicitly, around a reality as primary to and constitutive of meaning, worth, truth and value.'<sup>250</sup> This orientation has direct effects on how life is perceived: 'loving joy' is the mark of worship of God, idolatry is characterised by unhappiness and disorientation of that joy. Sin leads to the constriction of joy.<sup>251</sup>

Sin now appears as energised resistance to the dynamics of God and, thereby, as constriction in the fullness of being-in-communion and of joy. Sin is thus construed primarily in dynamic terms, as highly energised, comprehensive disorientation in, through and of all relationships. Such energised disorientation is also communicable and, whilst the claim of biological transmission has not been amenable to testing in relation to these pathologies, it is clear that his disorientation is transmittable through the dynamics of social relationships.<sup>252</sup>

Augustine's contribution is the concept of original sin, which adds an interpersonal dimension to the understanding of sin as a universal human condition and state.

Following McFadyen, original sin has four important characteristics:

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<sup>250</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 227.

<sup>251</sup> cf. Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 128.

<sup>252</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 246-47.

- contingent: it is not a necessary consequence of human freedom but presents a distortion of the human condition and is therefore not a necessary consequence of creaturely finitude.
- radical: it refers not to acts of sin and is neither episodic but refers to a fundamental distortion of being human.
- communicable: it is a pre-personal distortion which is communicated biologically; it is an alienation from God which, although pre-personal, nevertheless incurs guilt.
- universal: it is universally extensive, both as a condition or state and as an actualised possibility – we all commit sinful acts and share a solidarity in sin.<sup>253</sup>

Original sin is 'a fundamental change in the human condition imposed by God as a punishment for the sin of Adam.'<sup>254</sup> All human beings share an inherited disorder and weakness of will and reasoning. In its traditional understanding it is a biological condition, genetically transmitted and effected pre-personally and pre-socially, and therefore inescapable for all human beings. Original Sin is associated with concupiscence, the loss of control of the spirit over the flesh.

As a result of the original sin of Adam (*peccatum originale originans*), all human beings suffer the vulnerability of original sin (*peccatum originale originatum*): the human condition after the fall includes mortality, pain, fatigability, disease,

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<sup>253</sup> cf. McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 17.

<sup>254</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 148.

degeneration with age, and lust.<sup>255</sup> The fall has impaired the human capacity to perceive and then orientate itself to God, it consists of a weakening of both will and reason. Augustine views human sexuality as particularly vulnerable and tainted with lust, under 'the conditions of the fall our sexual desires are not fully co-ordinated with our orientation on God: they are not rationally ordered.'<sup>256</sup>

The rather scandalous doctrine of original sin has explanatory and descriptive power as to why sin is habit-forming and contagious, handed down in families through time and why sin is enslaving.

The fundamental biblical text about this human experience is found in Romans 7:14-35:

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Paul's experience of the divided self is mirrored in Augustine's own experience in his *Confessions*:

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<sup>255</sup> cf. Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 148.

<sup>256</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 189.



The enemy had my power of willing in his clutches, and from it had forged a chain to bind me. The truth is that disordered lust springs from a perverted will; when lust is pandered to, a habit is formed; when the habit is not checked, it hardens into a compulsion. These were interlinking rings forming what I have described as a chain, and my harsh servitude used it to keep me under duress. Thus my two wills - the old and the new, the carnal and the spiritual - were in conflict within me; and by their discord they tore my soul apart.<sup>257</sup>

The concept of original sin and the experience of the divided self are particularly helpful in understanding the phenomenon of addiction.

### 5.3.3 Sin and Addiction

It is quite obvious that addiction and sin have similarities. Images of healing and sickness fit well with addiction as well as with sin. There is limited theological literature about the relationship of addiction and sin and authors come to very different conclusions. A comprehensive overview is given by Chris Cook in his study on alcohol and Christian ethics.<sup>258</sup>

Lenters<sup>259</sup>, McCormick<sup>260</sup> and Lechler<sup>261</sup> understand addiction as the universal human condition, although with different emphases. The emergence of the 12 step group “Sinners Anonymous” rests on similar reasoning: addiction is synonymous with sin, we are all addicts and we are all in need of recovery, irrespective of the

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<sup>257</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), VIII, v10.

<sup>258</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*.

<sup>259</sup> Lenters, William, *Freedom we Crave : Addiction : the Human Condition* (Grand Rapids (Mich.): Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>260</sup> McCormick, Patrick T., *Sin as Addiction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).

<sup>261</sup> Lechler, *Nicht die Droge ist's*.

individual expressions of sin. Interestingly, this equation of sin and addiction, or the view of addiction as the human condition, leads to very different recommendations how to deal with this for individuals who perceive this as problematic: whereas Sinners Anonymous and Lechler would recommend 12 step work for everybody (Lechler actually sees 12 step work as a form of worship and worship as 12 step work), Kaminer<sup>262</sup> or Davies<sup>263</sup> see recovery work as having a counterproductive effect in allowing people to perceive themselves as victims. Rather few authors apply the moral model to addiction and equate it with a moralistic understanding of sin.<sup>264</sup> Several authors take a medium approach: whereas for McCormick addiction is both sin and disease, Plantinga<sup>265</sup> sees sin and addiction as overlapping domains.

Much more detailed investigations of the relationship of sin and addiction are offered by Linda Mercadante and by Chris Cook. Mercadante views sin and addiction as neither opposed nor analogous. The equating of addiction with sin overlooks the nuanced theological position that 'sin begins as a kind of freedom, but ultimately sin destroys freedom rather than epitomizing it.'<sup>266</sup> Addiction is a therapeutic concept about human behaviours whereas sin is concerned with orientation away from God. Cook discusses a number of similarities between addiction and sin. Both addiction and sin acknowledge a tension between will and

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<sup>262</sup> Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, you're Dysfunctional*.

<sup>263</sup> Davies, John Booth, *The Myth of Addiction : an Application of the Psychological Theory of Attribution to Illicit Drug Use* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood, 1992).

<sup>264</sup> e.g. Playfair, William L. and George Bryson, *The Useful Lie* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991).

<sup>265</sup> Plantinga, Cornelius, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be : a Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Leicester, 1995).

<sup>266</sup> Mercadante, *Victims and Sinners*, 48.

behaviour, competing desires, a complicated relationship between personal responsibility and vulnerability. Importantly, in practical terms this means that sin and addiction have in common that 'self reliance does not offer a solution, for it is the powerlessness of the self in the face of the power of sin that is at the root of the problem.'<sup>267</sup>

Following McFadyen, Cook views sin as 'a power which adversely influences human choice and decision-making, and which engages people in the very processes which bring about their own enslavement.'<sup>268</sup> Nevertheless, he resists the equating of addiction and sin and sees the human condition rather in the division of the will, as described by St Paul and, experienced by everybody in the most ordinary situations. Everybody experiences temptations and the difficulty of courageously resisting them. Almost everybody knows division of will in rather trivial examples like the challenge of losing weight, restricting the consumption of alcohol or changing unhelpful behaviours like too little physical exercise. For many people this division of will is far from trivial, but develops life-threatening dimensions (e.g. obesity). This goes far beyond the intake or avoidance of substances, but affects all areas of human behaviour and attitude. For instance, one may experience the powerlessness to change and control one's own materialistic greed, which is a classic dimension of sin. Addiction might be an expression of the universal human condition, 'representing the statistical extremes of normal human personality traits.'<sup>269</sup> The difference between addicts and non-addicts lies rather in

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<sup>267</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 146.

<sup>268</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 167.

<sup>269</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 165.

the ‘focus and scope of the conflict.’<sup>270</sup> According to Cook, it is not addiction that is the universal human condition, but the ‘subjective experience of division of will and self,’<sup>271</sup> experienced by different individuals in different ways. I wonder whether the division of will can be described more specifically by applying the fundamental nature of shame. This requires a short excursus to look at the traditional treatment of shame in theology.

#### **5.3.4 Sin and Shame**

##### **5.3.4.1 Traditional Approaches**

###### **5.3.4.1.1 Augustine and Aquinas**

Although the theme of shame is fairly central to scripture, the theological writing about shame is sparse. The first mention of shame refers to its absence in God’s unspoiled creation in Gen 2:25: ‘And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.’ Interestingly, shame is the very first consequence of the fall in Gen 3:7: ‘Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.’ After Adam had lost his unashamed identity, he went into hiding. It is surprising that, given its centrality in the fall, shame has not aroused more theological interest.

Partly, this may be due to labelling: Greek has available the various meanings of *aischyne*, *aeikes*, *entropē*, *elencheia* and *aidos*; Latin can draw upon *foedus*, *macula*,

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<sup>270</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 165.

<sup>271</sup> Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*, 166.

*pudor* and *turpitude*, but both Augustine and Aquinas – to name the two most influential – perceived shame as an emotion with (potentially) positive effects.

As mentioned above, Augustine recognises shame as a direct consequence of the fall. ‘When they were stripped of this grace, [...] there began in the movement of their bodily members a shameless novelty which made nakedness indecent: it at once made them observant and made them ashamed.’<sup>272</sup> For Augustine, nakedness and sexuality becomes shameful as a consequence of the fall.

Lust requires for its consummation darkness and secrecy; and this not only when un lawful intercourse is desired, but even such fornication as the earthly city has legalized. Where there is no fear of punishment, these permitted pleasures still shrink from the public eye. [...] Does not even conjugal intercourse, sanctioned as it is by law for the propagation of children, legitimate and honourable though it be, does it not seek retirement from every eye? [...] And why so, if not because that which is by nature fitting and decent is so done as to be accompanied with a shame-begetting penalty of sin?<sup>273</sup>

Shame itself, though seen as part of a punishment, is seen as a necessary and positive reaction, preventing human beings from sin: ‘Justly is shame very specially connected with this lust. [...] Shame modestly covered that which lust disobediently moved in opposition to the will, which was thus punished for its own disobedience.’<sup>274</sup> Aquinas argues similarly: citing Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Aquinas says that *verecundia* (modesty) is a praiseworthy emotion.<sup>275</sup> He notes elsewhere that it

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<sup>272</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (London: Random House, 2000), XIV.17.

<sup>273</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV.18.

<sup>274</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV.17.

<sup>275</sup> ‘Moreover, the philosopher says (*Ethic. ii, 7*) that modesty is a praiseworthy passion. Therefore some passions are good or evil according to their species.’ *Summa Theologica* 1.2.24.4. ‘*Summa Theologica* at Sacred Texts: Of Good and Evil in the Passions of the Soul’, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum159.htm> (26 November 2010).

is a virtue in the broad sense,<sup>276</sup> since feelings of shame encourage the avoidance of sin.<sup>277</sup>

What becomes apparent is that neither Augustine nor Aquinas perceive shame as something corrosive, fundamentally hindering the development of human beings in the sense of chronic, toxic or narcissistic shame discussed above, or at least label it as shame. Shame has been inadequately considered within the Christian tradition, which has mostly focused upon guilt. I would like to highlight a few aspects from the wide field of theology of sin that might be helpful for a more coherent understanding of the phenomena of toxic shame and addiction.

#### 5.3.4.1.2 Sin as Crime as well as Defilement

The dominant modern understanding of sin and alienation from God in terms of guilt and offence is biased. The traditional Augustinian understanding and the understanding of most of the Old Testament is broader: Augustine views the *peccatum originale originatum* as a punishment for the fall, something which is self-inflicted by human beings through Adam's *peccatum originale originans* and defiles the originally created human beauty. Following the studies of Paul Ricoeur,

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<sup>276</sup> "The integral parts of a virtue are the conditions the concurrence of which are necessary for virtue: and in this respect there are two integral parts of temperance, "shamefacedness," whereby one recoils from the disgrace that is contrary to temperance, and "honesty," whereby one loves the beauty of temperance. ST Secunda Secundae Quest. 143.1. 'Summa Theologica at Sacred Texts: Of the Parts of Temperance, in General', <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum400.htm> (26 November 2010).

<sup>277</sup> With regard to bodily movements and actions, moderation and restraint is the effect of "modesty," which, according to Andronicus, has three parts. The first of these enables one to discern what to do and what not to do, and to observe the right order, and to persevere in what we do: this he assigns to "method." The second is that a man observe decorum in what he does, and this he ascribes to "refinement." The third has to do with the conversation or any other intercourse between a man and his friends, and this is called "gravity." ST Secunda Secundae Quest. 143.2. 'Summa Theologica at Sacred Texts: Of the Parts of Temperance, in General', <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum400.htm> (26 November 2010).

earlier notions of sin as a stain and defilement are still tangible, in spite of the dominant modern understanding of sin as a crime against God's laws. Ricoeur shows that '[d]read of the impure and rites of purification are in the background of all our feelings and all our behavior relating to fault.'<sup>278</sup> 'The world of defilement is a world anterior to the division between the ethical and the physical.'<sup>279</sup>

This fits precisely with the Augustinian understanding of sin.

#### 5.3.4.2 *Modern Approaches*

The most comprehensive overview of modern theological thinking about shame is offered by Stephen Pattison.<sup>280</sup> After reviewing a large number of theological sources he comes to the dire conclusion that:

for most theologians, shame has not been a significant phenomenon as part of human experience or as a feature of the relationship between humans and God. It has received a negligible amount of sustained theological attention in the twentieth century.<sup>281</sup>

There is quite an amount of pastoral theological writing about shame, particularly from North America. The confusion about definition and terminology is problematic: e.g. there are various texts dealing with positive shame or differently defined shame.

I chose to explore an Augustinian perspective on sin because it has the advantage over other approaches of taking the problem seriously enough, of appreciating that

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<sup>278</sup> Ricoeur, Paul and Emerson Buchanan, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 25.

<sup>279</sup> Ricoeur and Buchanan, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 31.

<sup>280</sup> Pattison, *Shame*.

<sup>281</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 190.

shame is elusive and hidden and highly resistant to recognition, recovery and therapy, is a permanent feature of human life and defies healing in many people's lives. Additionally, shame has personal, interpersonal and universal aspects (see below). In my eyes this phenomenon cannot be adequately understood if the concept of original sin is rejected. The huge advantage of the Augustinian perspective is that it allows one to separate sin, particularly original sin, from personal or individual guilt.

Shame is confused and conflated with guilt. This prevents the fundamentally a-moral sense of shame from being recognised and addressed. It also means that guilt-relieving methods such as confession, repentance and forgiveness are unlikely to be effective in alleviating the 'sinner's' condition, particularly over the long term.<sup>282</sup>

This is precisely the point at which, in my eyes, an individualistic or optimistic approach is bound to fail. An example of a Barthian perspective on shame would be Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger's study, where she sees healing of shame offered through faith, correcting a distorted view of God and realising 'the honor and value that God accorded' her.<sup>283</sup> 'God enters fully into the shamefulness of sin and in Christ takes it upon himself so that human beings might share God's honor and glory.'<sup>284</sup> I am not convinced by this approach, as it sees shame as a distortion in the perception of God which is redeemable – it is individualistic in ignoring the 'shame-creating and –perpetuating aspects of God'<sup>285</sup> and the church itself and is entirely too positive about the prospects for healing and redemption. The

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<sup>282</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 248.

<sup>283</sup> Hunsinger, Deborah van Deusen, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling : a New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 201.

<sup>284</sup> Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling*, 199.

<sup>285</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 220.



corrosive, involuntary and universal nature of shame is not taken seriously enough. This is, in my opinion, the case with a number of other approaches outlined by Pattison.<sup>286</sup>

There are two more theological contributions relating to shame from modern theology which appear to be very helpful: the now classical criticism of the traditional understanding of sin from a feminist perspective first published by Valerie Saiving in 1960<sup>287</sup> and a chapter by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics*.<sup>288</sup>

#### 5.3.4.2.1 Feminist Theology of Sin

In her article from 1960, Valerie Saiving criticised that the emphasis of theology on sin as pride does not reflect the reality of all human beings. Instead, they reflect the situation of men with an emphasis on 'anxiety, estrangement [...] the conflict between necessity and freedom [...] identification of sin with pride, will-to-power, exploitation, self-assertiveness, and the treatment of others as objects rather than persons [and] its conception of redemption as restoring to man what he fundamentally lacks.'<sup>289</sup> From the perspective of women, sin would have to be differently construed with qualities such as: 'triviality, distractability, and diffuseness; lack of [...] focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the

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<sup>286</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 181-228.

<sup>287</sup> Saiving, Valerie, 'The Human Situation: a Feminine View,' in *Womanspirit Rising : a Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

<sup>288</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (Glasgow: Collins, 1964).

<sup>289</sup> Saiving, 'The Human Situation,' 35.

boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason – in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.<sup>290</sup> Recognising the underdevelopment, under-assertion and negation of the self as sinful is helpful in understanding shame: pride cannot be the primary sin of those who are shamed, oppressed and have very little pride or sense of self.<sup>291</sup> However, although pride cannot be the primary sin of those who are shamed, pride can be the most visible sin and can be an indicator of shame.

The problem is that, apart from identifying pride as the primary sin, notions of self have been viewed very negatively by classic theology.

#### 5.3.4.2 Self and Pride

Traditionally the self has been viewed very negatively by theology. Jesus calls his followers to deny themselves and follow him. 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it' (Mark 8:35-36).

Self is a rather modern concept and I do not want to be anachronistic by using modern notions. Following McFadyen, self can be defined as 'a means of organising oneself through a belief about oneself; as an organisational process rather than a substance of entity.'<sup>292</sup> Such an understanding of selfhood is not a substantial

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<sup>290</sup> Saiving, 'The Human Situation,' 37.

<sup>291</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 197.

<sup>292</sup> McFadyen, Alistair I., *The Call to Personhood : a Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 318.

personal core, but a belief about oneself, which is socially mediated. In this understanding of self, 'others can confer a deficient form of selfhood and identity if an unrealistically pessimistic assessment of the person's possibilities is routinely made.'<sup>293</sup>

The self has connotations of being selfish, of being rebellious and of putting one's own plans and ideas above the calling of God. However, it can be argued that this is a wrong understanding of self. The argument is twofold: Bruce Malina argues that there was no understanding of individual self in biblical times, but that Jesus argues instead against family and group loyalties, calling his disciples to become new selves.<sup>294</sup> Possibly more convincing is that self refers to a wrong perception of self, a harmed and wounded self which therefore becomes selfish and loses the perspective required for its own needs, its calling and the ability to recognise and follow God's call. The wounded self becomes selfish and loses the realistic perception of itself.

Very similar arguments can be presented about the most prominent sin in classic theology, identified as the cause of the *peccatum originale originans*, pride. It is associated with disobedience and rebellion against God, with becoming *incurvatus in se*, with separation from God and fellow human beings. The classic Christian 'horror of pride'<sup>295</sup> has prevented the positive valuation of confidence, self-esteem and competence experienced by the successful self: 'Pride is

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<sup>293</sup> McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 94.

<sup>294</sup> Malina, Bruce J., *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (London: Routledge, 1996), 67ff.

<sup>295</sup> Oppenheimer, Helen, 'Pride,' in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (London: SCM, 1986).

enjoyment/excitement invested in self, or in accomplishments by self.’<sup>296</sup> This experience is far from being negative, it is joyful and the necessary foundation of the ability to love others. However, distinct from a positive sense, pride, the original Greek term ὕβρις conveys a very different kind of pride.

Augustine wrote that:

“pride is the beginning of sin.” And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. And it does so when it falls away from that unchangeable good which ought to satisfy it more than itself. This falling away is spontaneous; for if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself, and so become frigid and benighted.<sup>297</sup>

Hubris implies ‘over-reaching proper personal and human limits [...] and the failure to recognise one’s proper place as a human dependant.’<sup>298</sup> Interestingly, all these descriptions of pride are precisely accurate descriptions of the condition of being bound to shame. Shame is a distorted perception of oneself and has the same counterbalancing virtue as pride: humility. Humility, properly understood as a realistic and respectful perception of oneself as being created, loved and worthy, is precisely what shame-distorted people need to achieve in recovery. ‘The self must learn to affirm the self from within.’<sup>299</sup> This is at the heart of the 12 step recovery programme, overcoming grandiosity by recognising oneself to be ‘not-God,’<sup>300</sup> but

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<sup>296</sup> Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame*, 225.

<sup>297</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV, 13.

<sup>298</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 248.

<sup>299</sup> Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame*, 224.

<sup>300</sup> Kurtz, Ernest, *Not-God : a History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, Minn: Hazelden, 1979).

accepting one's limitations, one's wounds, powerlessness and dependency, followed by the decision 'to turn [one's] will and our lives over to the care of God.'<sup>301</sup> Recovery consists of the replacement of toxic shame by a healthy sense of shame, a proper sense of one's place in creation identified by Aquinas as *verecundia* (modesty), which is a part of humility: 'Truly, the virtue of humility consists in this, that one keep himself within his own limits; he does not stretch himself to what is above him, but he subjects himself to his superior.'<sup>302</sup> Humility in that sense is the direct opposite of humiliation, but contains faith in 'the honor and value that God accorded.' Similarly to shame, one can differentiate between a healthy sense of pride in one's honour and value which is nothing but a realistic appreciation of oneself entirely consistent with humility, and an unhealthy and sinful pride, usually referred to as hubris. All the classic expressions of sin like the well known seven capital vices or deadly sins named wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony can be identified as outgrowths of shame. Pattison seems to say the same by identifying hubris as:

the concomitant of narcissistic wounding and self-abnegation that leads to compensatory grandiosity, self-obsession, arrogance and contempt for others. The implication is that what is often uncritically condemned as pride by theologians using traditional categories is, in fact, a symptom of shame.<sup>303</sup>

Aquinas, following Aristotle, has another fascinating contribution to this understanding of sins: his understanding of the "mean of virtue." According to him,

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<sup>301</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous : The Story of how Many Thousands of Men and Women have Recovered from Alcoholism*, 4. ed. (New York City: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001). ; *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, (New York: A. A. General Service Office, 1953).

<sup>302</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book IV, chapter 55, 20. 'Summa Contra Gentiles, translated by Charles J. O'Neil', <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles4.htm> (26 November 2010).

<sup>303</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 250.

virtue is not simply the opposite of sin, but every sin has a counter-sin.<sup>304</sup>

Transferred to the understanding of sins as outgrowths of shame, in patterns of either control or release, Aquinas' understanding makes perfect sense: the virtue opposed to alcoholism is not the compulsive avoidance of alcohol, but a generous and graceful sobriety.

Finally, shame has a universal and inescapable quality. In this respect an all too brief treatise by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* is most interesting.

#### 5.3.4.2.3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Interpreting the story of the fall in Genesis, Bonhoeffer views shame as the sign of the ontological condition of humanity after the fall:

Man perceives himself in his disunion with God and with men. He perceives that he is naked. Lacking the protection, the covering, which God and his fellow-man afforded him, he finds himself laid bare. Hence there arises shame. Shame is man's ineffaceable recollection of his estrangement from the origin; it is grief for this estrangement, and the powerless longing to return to unity with the origin. [...] Man is ashamed because he has lost something which is essential to his original character, to himself as a whole. [...] Man is ashamed of the loss of his unity with God and with other men.<sup>305</sup>

Intriguingly, Bonhoeffer's description of shame fits perfectly within the Augustinian understanding of the consequences of the fall.

Shame is more original than remorse. [...] When it knows that it is seen, is reminded of something it lacks, namely, the lost wholeness of life, its own nakedness.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2:1 Question 64. 'New Advent: Question 64: The Mean of Virtue', <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2064.htm> (26 November 2010).

<sup>305</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6. The language of the English translation is old-fashioned. The original German is far more inclusive.

<sup>306</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6.

Bonhoeffer sees shame as the sign of disunion between God and human beings and between human beings themselves; he also perceives shame as an intrinsic memory of that disunion conditional to the post-fallen humanity. Although shame can be alleviated through grace and fellowship, it is an inevitable ontological part of the human condition that can only be fully overcome after the restoration of full unity between humanity and God:

Shame is overcome only in the shaming through the forgiveness of sin, that is to say, through the restoration of fellowship with God and men. This is accomplished in confession before God and other men.<sup>307</sup>

Shame can be overcome only when the original unity is restored, when man is once again clothed by God in the other man, in the 'house which is from heaven', the Temple of God.<sup>308</sup>

Pattison is critical of Bonhoeffer's approach because he 'hardly engages with the painful reality and specificity of contemporary human alienation and defilement represented by chronic, dysfunctional shame.'<sup>309</sup> This may be true, but could be due to the brevity of Bonhoeffer's treatise. His understanding of shame as an ontological inevitability is precisely what differentiates Bonhoeffer from other theologians who see shame as a psychological problem.

#### 5.3.5 Outcomes

I want to make the rather daring suggestion that shame is a more basic category than pride. It can be argued that pride and other traditional expressions of sin can

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<sup>307</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 9.

<sup>308</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 8.

<sup>309</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 193.

be understood as symptoms of shame. If that is the case, it might be possible to slightly change the focus of original sin: the *peccatum originale originatum* is the vulnerability of human beings to an unrealistic perception of themselves, to shaming. I suggest a theological definition of shame: losing a realistic perception of oneself. As argued above, Original Sin describes the constitutional vulnerability of human beings of losing a realistic perception of themselves. If human beings are vulnerable to losing the sense of their honour and worth, they can be instrumental in causing others to lose their adequate self-perception. Original sin is not shame itself, as this is not pre-personal, but the human vulnerability to shaming. This vulnerability does not necessarily lead to shame, it is not a necessary outcome of human finitude, but for everybody living it is an inescapable reality. This vulnerability is biologically transmitted, and it is an inescapable aspect of growing up among other human beings and in human society: some amount of shaming is an inevitable reality for human beings. The human condition is to be susceptible and vulnerable to this. Shamed people have an unrealistic perception of who and what they are: as a result of human alienation from God they are prone to lose the awareness of their honour and worth as beings created in the image of God, therefore they try to hide this distortion through wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, or gluttony. Vulnerability to shaming fits the earlier description of original sin as contingent, radical, communicable and universal, it is both the result of the alienation of humanity from God and each other and its sign, following Genesis 3:7 naming shame as the first consequence of the fall. Susceptibility to shame is not a category of individual morality, but an ontological reality for all human beings.



This susceptibility is distinct from ‘ontological shame,’<sup>310</sup> ‘numinous unworthiness’<sup>311</sup> or healthy shame, which is nothing but a realistic appreciation of the difference between God and human beings. Following Karl Rahner, human beings are *a priori* aligned and referred to God, and original sin refers to the distortion through the fall that leads human beings to be vulnerable to confusion, resulting in the refusal of this adjustment or the replacement of its genuine addressee.

The pre-personal character of being prone to shame explains why shame has institutional and structural aspects, something I have only mentioned in passing so far. Like secular society, the Christian church is not exempt from being vulnerable to shame and in being bound to shame and ‘can create, exploit and deny shame in groups and individuals.’<sup>312</sup>

Being prone to shame is pre-personal and does not necessarily lead to individual acts of sin, but in reality has these consequences for every human being. Shame resists healing: some restoration is possible ‘in the shaming through the forgiveness of sin, that is to say, through the restoration of fellowship with God and men. This is accomplished in confession before God and other men.’<sup>313</sup> But finally ‘shame can be overcome only when the original unity is restored, when man is once again clothed by God in the other man, in the “house which is from heaven”,

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<sup>310</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*.

<sup>311</sup> Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Wilfred Harvey (London: Humphrey Milford, 1923), 54.

<sup>312</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 229. I will look at this in greater detail in the chapter about Ministerial Outcomes.

<sup>313</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 9.

the Temple of God,'<sup>314</sup> where God will 'anoint and cheer our soiled face with the abundance of his grace.'

Human beings deal with shame either with control or release behaviours. This fits Aquinas' observation of the mean of virtues - that sins have counter-sins that are distinct from virtue. The opposite of shame is the virtue of humility in the sense of a realistic sense of self, including the realisation of 'the honor and value that God accorded'<sup>315</sup> us. Humility therefore is the mother of all virtues. Thomas Moore expresses it poetically in 'The Loves of the Angels':

'Humility, that low, sweet root,  
From which all heavenly virtues shoot.'<sup>316</sup>

Hubris may be the primary sin of those who are shamed, in the sense that it may be the fault that is primarily visible. However, shame appears to have aetiological primacy, and both require the same antidote: humility.

#### **5.4 Outlook: towards a biblical understanding of shame**

One of the effects of shame described in the previous chapter is that it causes people to live life in extremes: shaming forces people into a cycle characterised by control and release. I am aware that this is based on the clinical experience of

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<sup>314</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 8.

<sup>315</sup> Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling*, 201. Referring to Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics.

<sup>316</sup> 'Old Poetry by Thomas Moore', <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/53054-Thomas-Moore-The-Loves-of-the-Angels> (26 November 2010).

various authors<sup>317</sup> and lacks verification in a properly scientific sense.

Nevertheless, this is widely accepted by practitioners, though not by all. In the next chapter I want to focus on cyclic behaviour and intend to show that there is a biblical model for how life can fail and human beings become ensnared by excessive appetites or deprivation behaviours.

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<sup>317</sup> Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'; Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*; Carnes and Moriarity, *Sexual Anorexia*; Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*.

## 6 A biblical understanding of Cycles of Control and Release

### 6.1 Introduction

The clinical observation that addicted people behave in cycles of control and release has been corroborated with research that shame-bound people in general engage in cyclic behaviour of this kind. There is a lack of data about the precise patterns of behaviour, which behaviours occur together, whether this is always the case or only in some cases and what influences this.<sup>318</sup> The same is true about family systems where patterns of control and release are split between members of families. Books dealing with family systems like the works of Sharon Wegscheider<sup>319</sup> are very popular in recovery circles, but do not enjoy the same recognition in the scientific community. However, despite the lack of scientific data, there seems to be convincing evidence that addicts and their families operate within patterns of control and release and that shame-disturbed families encourage this kind of pattern in their members.<sup>320</sup>

Fossum and Mason suggest that children growing up in shame-distorted families are confronted with unreachable standards in connection with the exercise of rigid control. Children try to reach these standards but inevitably fail. Although control

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<sup>318</sup> Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.' offers some statistical data, and although the conclusions support the claims of Fossum and Mason or Bradshaw, they do need backing up by further studies.

<sup>319</sup> Wegscheider, Sharon, *Another Chance : Hope and Health for the Alcoholic Families* (Palo Alto, Ca.: Science and Behavior Books, 1981); Wegscheider, Sharon, *The Miracle of Recovery* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 1989).

<sup>320</sup> There is a lack of empirical studies, but practitioners collected a wealth of evidence pointing towards this. For example Lechler, *Nicht die Droge ist's*; Roth, Kornelius, *Sexsucht : Krankheit und Trauma im Verborgenen*, 3. ed. (Berlin: Links, 2010); Wurmser, 'Trauma, Shame Conflicts, and Affect Regression.'

and release are natural human rhythms that are encountered in everybody's life, 'when organized and intensified by shame they become intense, out of control, and destructive polarities.'<sup>321</sup> This fits with what Theodor W. Adorno described as the authoritarian personality: 'the basically hierarchical, authoritarian, exploitive parent-child relationship is apt to carry over into a power-orientated, exploitatively dependent attitude towards one's sex partner and one's God and may well culminate in a political philosophy and social outlook which has no room for anything but a desperate clinging to what appears to be strong and a disdainful rejection for whatever is relegated to the bottom.'<sup>322</sup>

Bradshaw argues slightly differently: as the self of shamed people is wounded and the experience of this wound is painful, shamed people create a false self to escape the burden of self.<sup>323</sup> Very similar to Baumeister,<sup>324</sup> he argues that behaviours like perfectionism, rage or craving for control on the one side or indulging in food, alcohol or sex are mood-altering, therefore offering an escape from the painful perception of self. For shame-damaged people this experience of relief offered through mood altering behaviours can become addictive. He compares these behaviours to somebody in physical pain becoming dependent on painkillers.

The connecting pattern among these very different and seemingly contradictory behaviours is that their motivation is stemming from a negative and painful perception of self and offering a temporary relief from this sensation: either by numbing their self perception or by reinforcing their own sense of goodness and

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<sup>321</sup> Fossum and Mason, *Facing Shame*, 14.

<sup>322</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950), 971.

<sup>323</sup> Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, 82ff.

<sup>324</sup> Baumeister, *Masochism and the Self*; Baumeister, *Escaping the Self*.

value through appreciation from outside. Sadly, any outside appreciation of their goodness and value does not change the true self-perception of shamed people, apparently due to the motivation of these “selfless acts”: Miller notices that particularly gifted people were unable to turn their successes into a changed perception of themselves.<sup>325</sup> Some shamed people spend their lives helping others and making (apparently) huge personal sacrifices without ever perceiving themselves as good and helpful people. They use helping others to establish their own significance and worth and objectify others to meet their own needs in them.<sup>326</sup> These “helpless helper” relationships are at their heart about control and power and ‘objectification and failing to recognise and respect the autonomy and needs of others are real dangers. One can only speculate about how much physical abuse in helping relationships, caring and parental relationships is affected by the distortions of chronic shame.’<sup>327</sup> Since shamed people are preoccupied with themselves and their motivation for action is to alleviate their perception of self, they are basically incapable of truly caring for others. Pattison summarises that such people may be ‘very unsympathetic to the foibles and exigencies of others because they need to reinforce their own sense of goodness and value.’<sup>328</sup> Even in helping others, their motivation is caring for themselves through “being good” or being perceived as good; the basic motivation for shame-prone people is to exercise control over their painfully distorted perception of self.

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<sup>325</sup> Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*, 20.

<sup>326</sup> cf Jacoby, Mario, *Shame and the Origins of Self-Esteem : a Jungian Approach* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>327</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 129.

<sup>328</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 128.

I firmly believe that at the heart of the Christian gospel is a severe warning that a distorted perception of oneself and the various attempts to temporarily hide and deny this wrong perception is seen as a particularly deadly spiritual condition. Jesus warns his listeners about the equal dangers of hiding patterns of control and release in his parable most commonly known as that of the prodigal son in Luke 15. As both the classification of parables and the question of what counts as an appropriate interpretation of parables are quite controversial, I will spend some time on those two questions first.

## 6.2 Understanding Biblical Parables

### 6.2.1 Classifications

In biblical studies the word parable has at least three different uses.<sup>329</sup> In its widest sense the word is used in the biblical meaning of παραβολη which appears in the New Testament fifty times and is used to describe any comparative saying which intends to stimulate thought (e.g. proverbs such as 'Physician, heal yourself' (Luke 4:23), a riddle like 'How can Satan cast out Satan' (Mark 3:23), a comparison (Matt 13:33), a contrast (Luke 18:1-8) and both simple (Luke 13:6-9) and complex stories (Matt 22:1-14). The Hebrew word *mashal* is usually translated with παραβολη in the LXX and is used even more broadly in the Old Testament: *mashal* can be used for a taunt, a prophetic oracle or a byword. A mashal is any dark

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<sup>329</sup> following the classification of Snodgrass, Klyne, *Stories with Intent : a Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 10.

saying intended to stimulate thought. Therefore Gerhardsson labels almost all sayings of Jesus as *meshalim*.<sup>330</sup>

In a more restricted sense parable can refer to any analogy. Finally, the most restrictive understanding of parable follows Adolf Jülicher and distinguishes parable (Gleichniserzählung) from similitude (Gleichnis), example story (Beispiel Erzählung) and allegory (Allegorie). There is some confusion as, following this more restricted definition, similitudes, example stories and allegories are not counted as parables whereas under the first definition those are included. It is also debatable whether allegory and example stories are legitimate categories, what qualifies as a similitude and whether it is always possible to distinguish between similitudes and parables.

The ambiguity of classification is reflected in the difficulty of exactly defining parables. Starting from the word παραβαλλω which literally means 'to throw alongside' or in seaman's speech to 'come near by ship' or to 'cross over', parables have often been narrowly described as illustrations, as 'earthly stories with heavenly meanings'.<sup>331</sup> Other common definitions are often equally too narrow to apply to all parables or are necessarily imprecise. They are more than illustrations and they are not only concerned with the future heavenly kingdom, but directed to life on this earth. Various definitions restrict parables to being narratives (not all of them are), metaphors or similes (they are more than that), describe them as 'arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in

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<sup>330</sup> Gerhardsson, Birger, 'The narrative Meshalim in the Old Testament Books and in the Synoptic Gospels,' in *To Touch the Text : Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer SJ*, ed. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 788.

<sup>331</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 3.



sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought'<sup>332</sup>

(though some of them are neither and leave no doubt at all).<sup>333</sup> To include all sorts of different parables one needs to resort to definitions of a much more general nature: Theon's definition of fable or μυθος as a 'fictitious saying picturing truth'<sup>334</sup> is certainly true for parables, but also true for many different kinds of literature. Snodgrass reverts to modern poetry to grasp the different dimensions of parables, describing them as 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'.<sup>335</sup>

The concept of indirect communication developed by Søren Kierkegaard is helpful here. Direct communication is necessary for conveying information, whereas learning or understanding is more than receiving information, especially if the addressees do not see the need for changing their understanding. Indirect communication intends to overcome barriers to understanding by 'deceiving the hearer into the truth'.<sup>336</sup>

They are stories with an intent, analogies through which one is enabled to see truth. [...] A parable's ultimate aim is to awaken insight, stimulate the conscience, and move to action. They are used by those who are trying to get God's people to stop, reconsider their ways, and change their behaviour. Biblical parables reveal the kind of God that God is and how God acts, and they show what humanity is and what humanity should and may become.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Dodd, C. H., *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1936), 16.

<sup>333</sup> For a wider discussion of different definitions and classifications see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 7.

<sup>334</sup> Progymnasmata 1.21; 4.2 (μυθηος εστι λογος πσευδης εικονιζον αλετηειαν), quoted from Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 582, footnote 28.

<sup>335</sup> derived from Marianne Moore's description of poetry. Quoted from Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 582, footnote 29.

<sup>336</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren Aabje et al., *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard V. Hong, et al. (London: Bloomington, 1967), 288.

<sup>337</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 8.

However, the intention of the author to convince and persuade is not the sole reason why analogy and indirect communication are used. Divine truths or mysteries are necessarily expressed in parables – poetic language is not a way to darken otherwise plain truth but a handle to understand something which is not expressible in the same density and complexity via direct communication.

Conveying truth about God and his kingdom is necessarily expressed through analogy - Jesus' parables are handles for understanding his teaching on the kingdom. It is possible to explain a *μυθος*, an archetype or divine truth, but there remains an inexplicable mystery that is impossible to grasp in its entirety via direct communication – poetry and analogy are necessary to express this.

An allegory can always be translated into a text that can be understood by itself; once this better text has been made out, the allegory falls away like a useless garment; what the allegory showed, while concealing it, can be said in a direct discourse that replaces the allegory. By its triple function of concrete universality, temporal orientation, and finally ontological exploration, the myth has a way of revealing things that is not reducible from a language in cipher to a clear language.<sup>338</sup>

### 6.2.2 History of Parable Interpretation

As in speaking about all biblical texts, it has always been controversial as to what extent details of the parables are relevant for their proper understanding. Parables have always been allegorised and this was preceded and paralleled by Jewish and secular writers. The interpretative method of allegorising texts was frequently used by the Jewish philosopher and theologian Philo, by the authors of the Qumran scrolls or by Hellenistic interpreters of Homer or Plato. Within the church this way

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<sup>338</sup> Ricoeur and Buchanan, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 163-64.

of interpreting scripture went in harmony with the belief that scripture could yield a fourfold meaning: literal, allegorical-theological, ethical and heavenly.

The best known example of an allegorical interpretation of a parable is Augustine's treatment of the Good Samaritan: the man is Adam, Jerusalem the heavenly city, Jericho and the moon standing for human mortality, the robbers the devil and his angels, the priest and Levite the Jewish priesthood, the good Samaritan Christ - down to the donkey standing for as the incarnation and the two denarii the two commandments of love.<sup>339</sup>

In spite of criticism from some Church Fathers like Tertullian and John Chrysostom or Reformers like Luther and Calvin, this remained the dominant way of interpreting parables until the end of the 19th century. This method of interpretation has been criticised for two main reasons: allegorising is arbitrary and thus can offer contradictory interpretations, like seeing the hidden treasure (Matt 13:44) as Christ who is hidden in the field of scripture or as doctrine hidden in the field of the church. Secondly, allegorising means embedding parables in another belief system: not interpreting the text within its context or *Sitz im Leben*, but reading into them various features of the church's theology or concepts of modern science like psychology or sociology. 'Such an interpretative procedure assumes one knows the truth before reading the text and finds truth paralleled by the text being read, even if the text is about another subject.'<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Augustine, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, *Aurelii Augustini Opera* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1980), Quaestiones Evangeliorum 2.19

<sup>340</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 5.

The most influential criticism against the abuses of allegorising was presented by Adolf Jülicher in his two volumes published in 1888 and 1889.<sup>341</sup> Going further than a rejection of allegorising, Jülicher claimed that Jesus never used allegory (which he defined as a series of related metaphors) at all. He argued that allegory was too complex for the simple Galilean preacher and that it was a later addition by the evangelists. The original parables were simple and self-evident comparisons with no need of interpretation. For Jülicher, there could not be several points of comparison between an image (*Bild*) and the object portrayed (*Sache*), as is often the case with allegory. He claimed that parables were simple and could only have one *tertium comparationis* between an image and its object, and that Jesus' parables would only express a rather general religious maxim. Jülicher opened the quest for the original parables, unspoiled by the evangelists: the two influential writers, Dodd and Jeremias, both tried to remove allegory from parables, often using the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas as reference (which contains a number of shortened parables).<sup>342</sup>

Although today most of Jülicher's argument has been set aside, the question remains as to whether elements within the parable "stand for" something in reality. Since about 1970 the mood in biblical studies has changed and the historic-critic approach has been considered insufficient. Various authors have recently argued that parables are paradoxes and polyvalent, capable of multiple meanings,

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<sup>341</sup> Jülicher, Adolf, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftl. Buchgesellschaft, 1963).

<sup>342</sup> Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*; Jeremias, Joachim, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 10. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

resisting the idea that parables are reducible to abstract explanations.<sup>343</sup> Although it is nowadays widely admitted that allegory is rather a way of thinking than a literary genre, and that Jesus' parables are proportional analogies which may be allegorical and may have more than one correspondence between an image and the reality depicted, the danger here is to move full circle towards the restoration of allegorising: 'to alter a parabolic sign by embedding it within another belief-system and validating the new significance by reference to those beliefs.'<sup>344</sup> The danger remains of turning into allegory what was not intended to be allegory. Adapting and retelling the parables in new contexts can easily become the telling of new and different parables.

### 6.2.3 Biblical Hermeneutics

The thesis of Jülicher, Dodd and Jeremias that allegory is something alien to Jesus which has been added later under Hellenistic influence has been widely criticised. Instead, a number of biblical scholars recognise that parables contain metaphors that are not used for ornamentation or confusion, but that seek to express what is permanently and not just temporarily inexpressible. If one accepts scripture as inspired text in which God reveals himself, it is necessary that these texts use poetic or metaphorical language to show God who is *totaliter aliter*. It is necessary

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<sup>343</sup> Blomberg, Craig, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990); Crossan, John Dominic, *Polyvalent Narration* (Missoula, Mt.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977); Tolbert, Mary Ann, *Perspectives on the Parables: an Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>344</sup> Wittig, Susan, 'A Theory of Polyvalent Reading,' in *Seminar Papers*, ed. G. W. MacRae (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1975), 177. Referred to by Snodgrass, Klyne, 'From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: The History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus,' in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 22.

for biblical texts to be seemingly contradictory and paradoxical, otherwise God would not be 'greater than our heart' and would not 'pass all understanding.' 'The Wholly Other must always be radically new and one can experience it only within its metaphors.'<sup>345</sup> God remains hidden and is – following the apophatic tradition - only describable by negation. A positive description of God must fail. God's self revelation has to use metaphors: 'With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it' (Mark 4:33).

Both Tolbert<sup>346</sup> and Crossan<sup>347</sup> have stressed the polyvalence of parables, that 'establishing what a parable meant for Jesus for the early church, even when that is possible, does not necessarily illuminate what it can mean today.'<sup>348</sup> This means that the quest for the historical Jesus and his communicative intent remains vital for the understanding of any biblical text, but also that God's self revelation may have very different applications today or, to be more precise, that God's word continues to have an impact on people's lives.

### 6.2.4 Transcendental – Existential Shift in Exegesis

Following existential philosophy, Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger in particular, a number of theologians have asked the question how it is possible that finite human beings can glimpse the infinite God. This anthropologically-turned theology gave birth to a number of “responsorial” or correlational theological

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<sup>345</sup> Crossan, John Dominic, *In Parables : The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>346</sup> Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*.

<sup>347</sup> Crossan, *Polyvalent Narration*; Crossan, *In Parables*.

<sup>348</sup> Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 93.

approaches which assume that human beings are made in such a way that they have a *potentia oboedientialis* for God's revelation. Arguably the most influential among these theologians has been Karl Rahner, who proposes that human openness to transcendence is founded in the pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the infinite reality or the transcendent God. God is both the origin and the goal of human existence. Rahner distinguishes two kinds of revelation: universal-transcendental revelation (which refers to the experience of God that could happen anywhere and for everyone) and special-categorical revelation (which is an expression of the former within special and categorical ways, which culminates in the revelation of Jesus Christ). In contrast to Karl Barth, who views revelation in opposition to all things human, Rahner proposes an inner openness to the reception of God's revelation. This receptional potential is in itself both a divine gift and an act of revelation to humankind. Grace is a *constitutivum* of human existence, and revelation is the supreme entelechy and norm of human insight. "*Natura pura*" therefore does not exist: by being gifted with the divine existential the whole human existence is always constituted by divine grace. Interestingly, for Rahner the personal revelation of God remains in a mode of consistent mystery (*bleibende Geheimnishaftigkeit*). Even in the biblical self-revelation 'God remains the unspeakable and nameless God, who can never, not even by his self-communication in grace and immediate perception, be grasped.'<sup>349</sup>

Following Rahner, Eugen Drewermann proposes that universal-transcendental revelation is happening on the level of evolution, in which 'God put images of trust

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<sup>349</sup> Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, 128. Own translation.

into human soul.'<sup>350</sup> Drewermann locates the human giftedness with God's *a priori* revelation in archetypes within the human psyche. He interprets the creation of man in the image of God in that way, that the human soul and the divine are connected.

#### 6.2.5 Excursion: Eugen Drewermann and Exegesis

The starting point for Eugen Drewermann's new approach in natural theology is his critique of the historical-critical method of exegesis. This method 'necessarily witnesses towards the meaning of a text in the past, not in the present.'<sup>351</sup> He considers the question of historicity the 'most shallow question one can ask a religious text'<sup>352</sup> and sees the relevance of a biblical text in the everlasting living in it and speaking through it, in the transcendence of what is historically conditioned. Historical-critical exegesis for him makes only sense if it shows that 'religion is never only history, never only past and never only something conditioned by society.'<sup>353</sup>

Seeing the point of exegesis in bridging the 'ill-fated rift between history and faith'<sup>354</sup> he considers the historical-critical method grossly over-rated and incapable of actualising the existential quality of an inspired text. A religious

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<sup>350</sup> Drewermann, Eugen, *"An ihren Früchten sollt ihr sie erkennen" : Antwort auf Gerhard Lohfinks und Rudolf Peschs "Tiefenpsychologie und keine Exegese"*, 5. ed. (Olten: Walter, 1992), 97. Own translation.

<sup>351</sup> Drewermann, Eugen, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese* (Olten: Walter, 1984), 12. Own translation.

<sup>352</sup> Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, 23. Own translation.

<sup>353</sup> Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, 51. Own translation.

<sup>354</sup> Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, 765. Own translation.



question always contains an existential question, and for these the historical-critical method is unsuitable.

In its separation from feelings, in its isolation from the subject, in its incompetence, to take the internal, psychological reality for infinitely more important than the level of the external facts, is this form of exegesis principally atheistic, however often it may mention God. It is unable to actualise the world of images and dreams to which all truly religious words owe their origin [...] and even when it speaks about the "event" of God in human history, it can not do otherwise than in the historical distance to a past vision, in which we people of today, separated by the dust of millennia, are unable to participate.<sup>355</sup>

One of the criticisms made against Drewermann has been that he completely accepts the scientific, post-enlightened worldview in which any supernatural miracles are impossible.<sup>356</sup> He insists for example that Mary was not a virgin and the grave was not empty, but that these are only true in telling of an inner reality within the human soul. However, he reckons that the historical-critical method has caused the problem that within the German language area there would be no exegete who would, for example, publicly defend the stories of Nazareth and Bethlehem as historic reports.<sup>357</sup> Locating the biblical stories within the human psyche has according to Drewermann solved the problem 'for the benefit of catholic doctrine.'<sup>358</sup>

Following this, he proposes a hermeneutic which is both capable of an existential actualisation of God's revelation and capable of having a therapeutic dimension.

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<sup>355</sup> Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, 12. Own translation.

<sup>356</sup> cf. Lohfink, Gerhard and Rudolf Pesch, *Tiefenpsychologie und keine Exegese : eine Auseinandersetzung mit Eugen Drewermann* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1987).

<sup>357</sup> Schweer, Thomas, *Drewermann und die Folgen : vom Kleriker zum Ketzer? ; Stationen eines Konflikts*, 3. ed. (München: Heyne, 1992), 51.

<sup>358</sup> Schweer, *Drewermann und die Folgen*, 51.

This therapeutic potential of exegesis he views almost as a criterion of truthful exegesis.<sup>359</sup> Drewermann tries to bridge the gap between objective science and subjective concernment in order to make salvation presently experienced in the process of exegesis, very similar to the *mysterium salutis* made present in sacraments (following Odo Casel<sup>360</sup>). In this he sees himself in the tradition of Kierkegaard, who viewed objective or scientific talk about God as an 'adroit way of talking about God to hold the reality of God at bay.'<sup>361</sup> Following Kierkegaard's principle of simultaneity of understanding, Drewermann calls for an exegesis which takes the internal human world seriously: an exegesis which connects the revelation within scripture with the universal-transcendental revelation of God in archetypes.

A historic truth can only ever be approximately grasped, and this the better, as one explores it as objective as possible, in isolation from one's own existence. Just the opposite is the case for the religious truth: this requires to be grasped with one's whole existence, because it claims to encompass the whole human existence.<sup>362</sup>

The task of a biblical hermeneutic is to retrieve the timeless and eternal, what is independent of the social or cultural factors of the origin of a text. Methodically exegesis needs to ask whether a biblical text is an expression of a socially determined phenomenon or whether it expresses something eternal that is a fundamental and constitutional part of human existence: the archetypes. In other words, archetypes within the human collective unconscious are God's universal-

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<sup>359</sup> Drewermann, "An ihren Früchten sollt ihr sie erkennen", 40.

<sup>360</sup> cf. Casel, Odo et al., *Vom christlichen Mysterium : gesammelte Arbeiten zum Gedächtnis von Odo Casel* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1951).

<sup>361</sup> Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, 13. Own translation.

<sup>362</sup> Drewermann, "An ihren Früchten sollt ihr sie erkennen", 22. Own translation.

categorical revelation, the same as what Rahner calls an existential. Where Rahner builds on Martin Heidegger, Drewermann builds on Carl Gustav Jung. Such a hermeneutic has to be typological: A typological hermeneutic looks for these things which 'in their specialty say something exemplary, typical about man themselves and the offer the conclusion, that they are in their specific form anchored in man themselves.'<sup>363</sup> This is precisely the kind of hermeneutics I am going to apply to the aforementioned parable.

### 6.2.5.1 Archetypes

Archetypes are structures within the human psyche which are common to all humanity. This is based on C. G. Jung's theory that all human beings share a collective unconscious, which gives a basic organisation of myths, dreams and symbols in which the Holy, God, the world and reality as a whole are recognised. In his theological reception and adaptation of C. G. Jung, Drewermann is by no means alone or first. As Schnelzer<sup>364</sup> points out, Karl Rahner already talks in 1950, in a small publication called 'Geistliches Abendgespräch', about Jung and his archetypes and their theological relevance, and explicitly equalises them with universal-categorical revelation.<sup>365</sup>

Similarly, his brother Hugo Rahner advances the view of an archetypal religiousness *a priori*. 'The force of meaning within symbols [...] is given to man, is

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<sup>363</sup> Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, 54. Own translation.

<sup>364</sup> Schnelzer, Thomas, *Archetyp und Offenbarung : die Archetypenlehre C.G. Jungs im Rahmen von E. Drewermanns Offenbarungskonzeption* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999), 322-24.

<sup>365</sup> Rahner, Karl, 'Geistliches Abendgespräch über den Schlaf, das Gebet und andere Dinge,' in *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1956).

not arbitrarily constructed by him, is therefore in its original form present in every religion and is part of the archetypes of all human search for God.'<sup>366</sup>

On a different level, other biblical scholars have tried to connect the theories of C. G. Jung with biblical stories and there is a large amount of literature trying to connect psychological insights with exegesis. The decisive difference with Karl Rahner, Hugo Rahner and Eugen Drewermann is that their approach presumes an epistemological (not ontological) primacy of the world of archetypes.<sup>367</sup>

### 6.3 Justifying the connection: a Reader-orientated Approach

One way to justify the application of the parable of the prodigal to sexual addiction and shame is by starting with the reader: this parable has been identified by addicts as relating to their condition and is seen by them as depicting their story both in developing addiction and recovery. Chuck C., in his talks to conventions of Alcoholics Anonymous,<sup>368</sup> identified the alcoholic with the younger son and devoted a chapter in his book to the parallels between the biblical parable and the situation of the suffering and recovering addict. A number of addicts I have spoken to were immediately able to identify this parable as a text that talks about their story, their addiction and their recovery, their experience with God. A number of people named this story as a key text in their recovery from addiction, as a story

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<sup>366</sup> Rahner, Hugo, *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Deutung*, 3. ed. (Basel: Herder, 1989), 28. Own translation.

<sup>367</sup> e.g. Kille, D. Andrew, *Psychological Biblical Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); Kille, D. Andrew and Wayne Gilbert Rollins, *Psychological Insight into the Bible : Texts and Readings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007); Rollins, Wayne Gilbert, *Jung and the Bible* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983).

<sup>368</sup> later published as C., Chuck, *A New Pair of Glasses* (Irvine, CA: New Look Publishing Company, 1984).

which speaks to them and works for them. Secondly, the interpretation of the parable by Henri Nouwen,<sup>369</sup> though having been criticised as being “over the top” in the way of psychologising the story, needs to be acknowledged as one of the most popular spiritual books ever. In reverse, it made the Rembrandt painting one of the most popular prints for sale in every Christian bookshop. Nouwen himself relates the parable to addiction:

The world’s love is and always will be conditional. As long as I keep looking for my true self in the world of conditional love I will remain “hooked” to the world—trying, failing and trying again. It is a world that fosters addictions because what it offers cannot satisfy the deepest cravings of my heart.

Addiction might be the word to explain the lostness that so deeply permeates contemporary society. Our addictions make us cling to what the world proclaims as the keys to self-fulfilment: accumulation of wealth and power; attainment of status and admiration; lavish consumption of food and drink, and sexual gratification without distinguishing between lust and love. These addictions create expectations that cannot but fail to satisfy our deepest needs. As long as we live within the world’s delusions, our addictions condemn us to futile quests in the “the distant country,” leaving us to face an endless series of disillusionments while our sense of self remains unfulfilled. In these days of increasing addictions, we have wandered far away from our Father’s home. The addicted life can aptly be designated a life lived in a distant country. It is from there that our cry for deliverance rises up.<sup>370</sup>

Later on, he specifically relates the parable to infatuation with another person and sexual obsessions.<sup>371</sup> Tellingly, the book is often mentioned as recommended reading for sexual addicts.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

<sup>370</sup> Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 42-43.

<sup>371</sup> Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 49.

<sup>372</sup> for example on ‘Sexual Recovery Institute: Bookstore’, <http://www.sexualrecovery.com/resources/bookstore.php> (27 November 2010); ‘Marriages Restored: Rebuilding and Renewing’,

Another reference to the parable specifically from an addiction perspective is found in the song 'Prodigal Blues' by Billy Idol, which compares the singer's struggle with drug addiction to the parable.<sup>373</sup> People suffering from addiction experience the parable as a transformative agent, as a story with intent, as a story reflecting their own story. Hence addicts treat this parable as it is meant to be treated: 'Rather, reading the parables as they were meant to be read is to be "once more astonished" by the gospel – so to engage with the text in all of its detail, contingency, and after-life in the tradition, that, like Jacob after his struggle with God at the Jabbok, we come away marked for life.'<sup>374</sup>

So, although some could argue that relating the parable of the prodigal to addiction is inappropriate, it needs to be acknowledged that the story has an impact on people in that situation, and has an existential dimension which supersedes its historic context.

### 6.4 Interpreting the Parable

#### 6.4.1 Introduction

Having sketched the argument against allegorising in its classic and modern forms, and the limited amount of interpretation most scholars agree upon, how is it possible to relate the parable of the prodigal to a secular phenomenon like sexual addiction without repeating the mistakes of past interpreters in new ways? How is

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[http://www.marriagesrestored.com/marriages/2004/07/henri\\_nowen\\_and.html](http://www.marriagesrestored.com/marriages/2004/07/henri_nowen_and.html) (27 November 2010).

<sup>373</sup> see Appendix

<sup>374</sup> Barton, Stephen C., 'Parables on God's Love and Forgiveness (Luke 15:1-32),' in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 200.

it possible to be a faithful listener to the parable and not read into it one's own concepts and belief system? The short answer is that this is impossible.

Any one who has worked within biblical scholarship knows, or ought to know, that we biblical scholars come to the text with just as many interpretative strategies and expectations as anyone else, and that integrity consists not of having no presuppositions but of being aware of what one's own presuppositions are and of the obligation to listen to and interact with those who have different ones.<sup>375</sup>

Although it is a fact that parables are not necessarily simple and no literature is self-interpreting, there is a limit to what is an appropriate interpretation.

Applying this parable to different contexts is nothing new. A number of recent authors have stressed the polyvalence of parables, their possibility of being read in different contexts. It is nothing new to interpret the prodigal son and his older brother in a wider sense like G.V. Jones in terms of freedom and estrangement, longing and return, anguish and reconciliation,<sup>376</sup> or to read it in terms of Freudian psychology as did Mary Ann Tolbert.<sup>377</sup> Karl Barth uses the parable in his *Dogmatics* to treat the incarnation, stating that

in the going out and coming in of the lost son in his relationship with the father we have a most illuminating parallel to the way trodden by Jesus Christ in the work of atonement, to His humiliation and exaltation. Or better, the going out and coming in of the lost son, and therefore the fall and blessing of man, takes place on the horizon of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ and therefore of the atonement made in him.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 11.

<sup>376</sup> Jones, Geraint Vaughan, *The Art and Truth of the Parables : a Study in their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1964).

<sup>377</sup> Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*.

<sup>378</sup> Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation.*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 4. Part 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958)., 21.

Following the hermeneutical comments made above it becomes apparent why this can be, why an inspired text written in a different historic and socio-cultural context can have existential meaning today. I would not go as far as Eugen Drewermann and see an interpretation as valid only when it locates the historicity of a biblical story solely within the human soul. I also would not agree with him that a transcendental-therapeutic actualisation is the only way to read scripture. However, I do certainly think that, in addition to a historical-critical exegesis of the text, such an actualisation is asked for and worthwhile, particularly with a metaphorical text like a parable which has been identified by others to have an impact on people suffering from addiction. The parable of the prodigal is a prime example where existential actualisation makes most sense: Jesus used metaphorical language to express something otherwise inexpressible, something which reaches beyond the historical context of the story.

I like to think that the following interpretation is less risky and removed from the original communicative intent. I do want to risk the hypothesis that Jesus warned his listeners about the spiritual danger of a distorted self perception by describing two seemingly different types of possible reaction stemming from the same distortion.



**6.4.2 General Interpretation**

The parable of the prodigal is probably the best known and most popular of Jesus' parables. It has been highly influential on literature and art, music and film.<sup>379</sup> Its traditional title 'the Parable of the Prodigal Son' (*de filio prodigo* in the Vulgate) has been widely criticised as being inadequate since it ignores the second half of the story, and various alternative titles have been suggested.<sup>380</sup> However, though titles like 'the parable of the Compassionate Father and his two lost Sons'<sup>381</sup> may be much more descriptive or 'Sons behaving badly'<sup>382</sup> may sound much more intriguing, for reasons of familiarity and brevity none of the alternatives has yet replaced the traditional title and probably never will. The prodigal is the longest of Jesus' parables and has the most discourse.

In its context in Luke 15 it is used to defend Jesus' table fellowship with sinners against criticism from the Pharisees. The three parables of the Lost Sheep (vv 4-7), the Lost Coin (vv 8-10) and the prodigal (vv 11-32) are possibly intended to be read as one literary unit. They share the theme of God's delight in converted sinners, they share words and phrases like repentance, joy and the theme of finding the lost, and the first two share a common structure: something is lost and found which causes a celebration and this is followed by a *nimshal*.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> For an overview on the influence of the parable on various forms of art see Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, *Anchor Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1083-84.

<sup>380</sup> cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1083.

<sup>381</sup> Young, Brad, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 143.

<sup>382</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S., 'Son(s) Behaving Badly: The Prodigal in Foreign Hands,' in *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible : a Reader*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

<sup>383</sup> see Barton, 'Parables on God's Love and Forgiveness,' 201.

Scholarly controversy has arisen concerning this parable. In his comprehensive study Snodgrass identifies eight main issues:<sup>384</sup>

1. Was this parable originally shorter?

Since Jülicher and his theory that allegorising is due to the influence of the evangelists, some biblical scholars have argued that the parable was originally shorter.<sup>385</sup> This is of no significance for this study – it takes the Canon for granted and deals with the text as inspired as it stands.

2. Does it have any relation to Matthew's parable of the Two Sons?

Though a few scholars suggest that Luke constructed his parable after knowing Matthew's parable of the two sons this seems to be a minority view.<sup>386</sup> Again this is of no concern to my study.

3. Against what background should one read?

This is a complex debate and an enormous amount of literature has been produced to find the background of the story in several different OT texts, various Greco-Roman influences, and rabbinic discussions. Though knowing these different backgrounds enhances the understanding of the parable, no specific text or group of texts provides the background or hermeneutical key for interpretation.

4. How should cultural factors inform the reading of the parable? In particular, how do cultural and legal factors pertaining to the younger son's request and the father's division of property influence understanding?

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<sup>384</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 118-41.

<sup>385</sup> For an overview of writers arguing this point see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 626, Footnote 173.

<sup>386</sup> see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 626 footnote 176

The younger son's demand for his inheritance before his father's death and particularly his leaving and thus denying his responsibility for caring for his father would have been viewed negatively by Mediterranean societies of the time. In addition, his covetousness, his squandering and his lifestyle would have been considered sinful by these societies as well. Again, though the cultural background is certainly illuminating, the parable works foremost as a story and does work well without detailed knowledge of its legal and cultural background.

5. What is the point of analogy?

Even Jülicher accepts that the parable of the prodigal is an analogy for God dealing with sinners and rejecting complaints from those claiming to be righteous.<sup>387</sup>

In its context within Luke the parable contrasts God's acceptance and joy about a repentant sinner with the attitude of the Pharisees. However, various other interpretations have been offered. Wright suggests that the parable mirrors the story of Israel, but he is less convincing in mirroring the elder brother with the Samaritans who did not want Israel to return from exile.<sup>388</sup> Others have interpreted the story as depicting the human condition in general in terms of the possibility of getting lost and found – which, although sin is of course part of the human condition, is questionable because Luke places the story in a specific context: a controversy about how to deal with sinners.<sup>389</sup>

6. What does the parable teach about the Pharisees?

The father's positive comments about the elder son and the honour given to him

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<sup>387</sup> Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 352,61.

<sup>388</sup> Wright, N. T., *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 126-31.

<sup>389</sup> cf Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 133-34.

are puzzling if the elder son represents the Pharisees and scribes. Interpreting these comments as being about the relation of the Pharisees to God and their inclusion in the kingdom ('Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.') has been criticised as stretching the boundaries of the parable, as it involves allegorising its content and using it to make theological points that the story is not dealing with: it 'contrasts the attitude of the father (God) and the attitude of the elder son (the Pharisees) toward the repentant.'<sup>390</sup> It does not give a complete picture of the reality it portrays.

7. What is the theological significance of the parable?

In this respect the parable is extremely open to interpretation. Though most writers agree that the parable is about God, sinners and the seemingly righteous, it remains controversial as to what conclusions can be drawn about repentance, christology, or the atonement and whether these interpretations constitute and abuse of the story.

8. What is the purpose of the parable?

If taken within its Lucan context, the parable has three obvious purposes: it illustrates the pardoning love of God towards an outcast, it invites us to celebrate this and rejoice and it defends Jesus' association with sinners. Depending on where one sees the point of analogy, various other purposes have been suggested, from illustrating psychological realities to being an encouragement for mission: 'if God

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<sup>390</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 135.

is receiving sinners so eagerly, then that message needs to be shared, and people need to be invited home.'<sup>391</sup>

#### **6.4.3 The Parable of the Prodigal Son as a Typology of Sin and Shame in Patterns of Control and Release**

A parable is foremost a 'house in which the reader or listener is invited to take up residence.'<sup>392</sup> As such, it works as a story in itself, without having to dig too deep into the structure or the context. The story is inexhaustible and has triggered an enormous amount of comments, poetry, art and literature: it is impossible within the confines of this study to pay justice to the existing literature.

##### **6.4.3.1 People around Jesus**

Jesus told all three parables in Luke 15 in response to a challenge by the Pharisees: 'Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."'<sup>393</sup> Jeremias says that it is 'important to realize that in the east, even today, to invite a man to meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life.'<sup>394</sup> Jesus welcomed sinners in a way which was understood as something like a

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<sup>391</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 142.

<sup>392</sup> Bailey, Kenneth E., *The Cross & the Prodigal : Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 87.

<sup>393</sup> Lk 15:1-2

<sup>394</sup> Jeremias, Joachim, *New Testament Theology : the Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 115.

sacramental act: sharing a meal was a deep expression of fellowship. It is important that Jesus did not tell this parable to comfort the public sinners and assure them of God's scandalous forgiveness. Instead there is nothing sentimental about this parable: he told all three parables in Luke 15 in response to the complaints of the Pharisees. Jesus pleads with the moral insiders, not with the outsiders.

#### **6.4.3.2 *Lost Sheep and lost Coins***

The first parable of the lost sheep contrasts the good shepherd with the behaviour of the Pharisees. They, as religious leaders, as "shepherds of Israel", should act like the good shepherd in the parable: accept responsibility for the loss, search without counting the cost, rejoice in the burden of restoration, and rejoice with the whole community at the success of the restoration.<sup>395</sup>

Additionally, Jesus redefines sin as being lost and repentance as 'acceptance of being found.'<sup>396</sup> The rescue work is not to be earned by doing anything, it is the acceptance of being found which constitutes the restoration.

In the second parable about the lost coin Jesus is still talking about material possessions. The redemption of a lost sinner should have equal priority with the loss of one's own money – which clearly was the fault of the woman herself!

Equally, the finding of a lost tax-collector should stimulate similar joy to the finding of badly needed money. Whereas the shepherd loses one out of a hundred sheep,

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<sup>395</sup> cf. Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 33.

<sup>396</sup> Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 33.

the woman loses one of ten coins – the third parable makes the comparison with losing one's only brother.

#### **6.4.3.3 Lost Brothers**

From the very beginning Jesus makes clear that he talks about both brothers:

'There was a man who had two sons.'<sup>397</sup> This is important: although the older brother only appears at the end of the story, his mentioning at the beginning clarifies that the parable is about both sons.

The parable continues with the scandalous behaviour of the younger son.

According to Jeremias there were legal procedures to deal with property if the death of a landowner came near: the heirs were given the right of possession, but not the right of disposition.<sup>398</sup> This is clearly the situation at the end of the parable when the father tells the older son: 'All that is mine is yours.'<sup>399</sup> Apparently it was unthinkable for a son to demand his portion of the family wealth, including the right of disposition, whilst his father was still alive. Following Bailey, this request meant that the son wanted his father to die.<sup>400</sup> Surprisingly, the request is granted. The Father does not retaliate or punish, he continues his affection and bears the agony. Following Deuteronomy 21:17 the younger son would be given one third of the family wealth. To lose one third of their possessions would mean a huge loss in status for the father and the entire family. The Greek uses the word βίος (life) for

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<sup>397</sup> Lk 15:11

<sup>398</sup> Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 128.

<sup>399</sup> Lk 15:31

<sup>400</sup> cf. Bailey, Kenneth E., *Jacob & the Prodigal : how Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 95.

the family property. The parable specifically mentions the haste in which the prodigal 'gathered all he had', showing why the story carefully avoids the term inheritance (οὐσία instead of κληρονομία). Inheritance would have implied responsibility, for the wider family, servants, livestock and the land. Instead the younger son turns everything into cash within a few days, breaks all family ties, denies responsibilities and leaves the country. The conflict described here is not about sheep or money, this is about the total rejection of relationships. By doing so, the younger son took a great risk: first century custom demanded the *Kezazah* (cutting off) ceremony for a Jew who had lost the family inheritance to the Gentiles and returned home – it meant public disgrace and loss of family rights if he did not succeed.

In this dramatic situation the absence of the older brother is remarkable. It would have been his responsibility to seek reconciliation, to act as a mediator between the father and his younger brother to save both from losing face. Bailey reasons from this that a difficult relationship with the older brother may have been the reason for the younger brother's leaving.<sup>401</sup>

In a far country, he spends all his money. The text does not say what he spends his money on – his brother's slanderous remarks at the end of the story are made before the two even meet. Max Beckmann depicts the prodigal son in a telling picture, lost and entrapped in sexuality and lust. The way out of this hopeless situation - depicted as a yellow field – is blocked by the topless blonde whose hug appears more possessive than comforting or close. This picture describes what the older brother says about the prodigal – it is how it could have been, not how it has

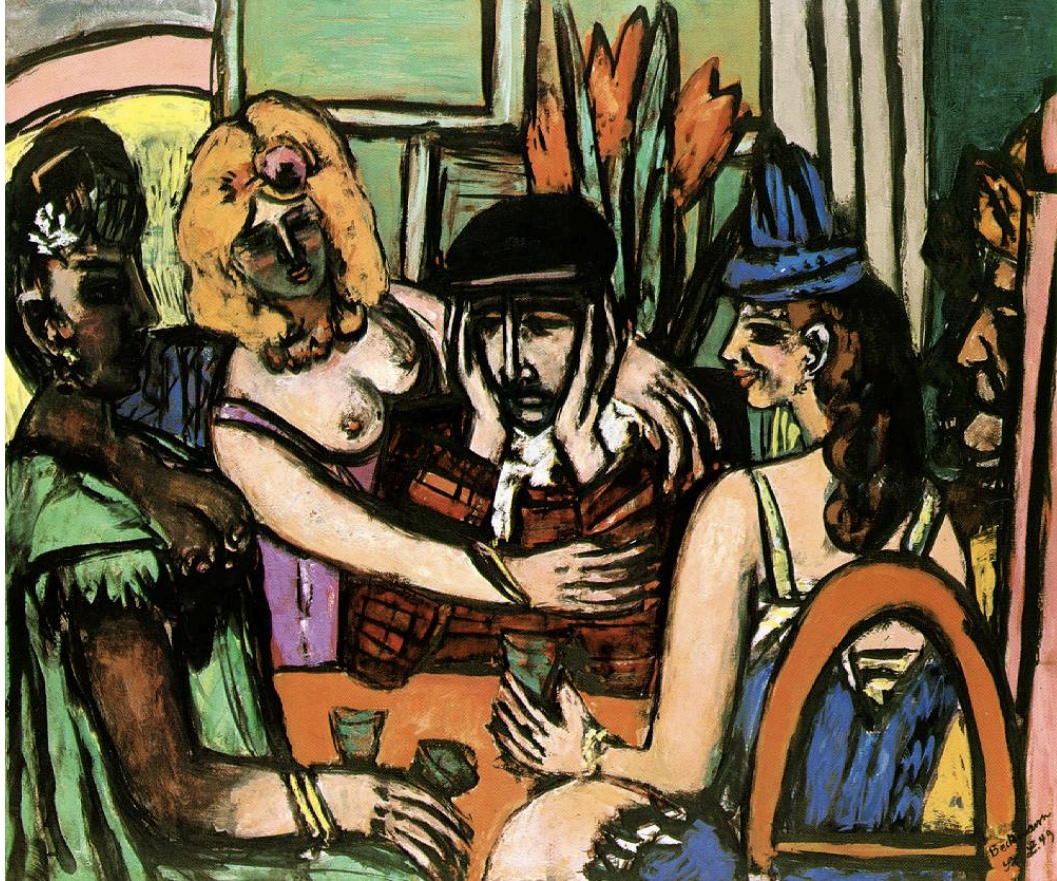
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<sup>401</sup> cf. Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 46.



to have been. In connection with the subject of sex addiction, Beckmann's interpretation is particularly interesting.

Figure 9: Max Beckmann: *Der verlorene Sohn* (1949, Landesgalerie Hannover)



When a famine hits the foreign country, he ends up looking after pigs – the most disgraceful situation imaginable for a faithful Jew. Realising that his plans are shattered, he comes to himself (εις εαυτόν δε ελθών) which Bailey does not equalise with repentance. His desire is to eat, not reconciliation. Instead, in spite of “hitting bottom,” he “gets smart” and devises a face-saving plan: following the *Kezazah* ceremony he hopes to be taken in as a paid labourer, which would put him in the position to earn a wage, pay back the money he has lost and earn a new place in the community. That this is a cunningly devised plan triggered by failure and hunger and not by interior remorse is affirmed through the way he devises his

speech: his opening words 'Father, I have sinned before heaven and your sight' is a paraphrase of Pharaoh speaking to Moses after the first plague. The audience at the time would have recognised this and remembered that Pharaoh did not feel true remorse.<sup>402</sup> He is still relying on his strength, his willpower and his ability to manipulate things. In planning to become a hired labourer he wants to solve the monetary problem, not the broken relationship.

In the deepest sense the prodigal is not going home. He is going back to servanthood. As long as his former attitudes remain, he is still in a far country spiritually, even as he physically approaches his home village. In short, at the edge of the village he is still lost.<sup>403</sup>

When the younger son returns, the father breaches all customs again, ignoring his status and honour by running to meet him. Bailey sees the self-humiliation of the father as the locus of the incarnation and atonement in the story. The father does not listen to his son's practised speech; he kisses him and embraces him.

Overwhelmed by this outpouring of love, the son surrenders his plans and his speech and confesses his unworthiness. He does not offer any solution to the situation. In this situation of total surrender, the father reinstates him as a son and as an heir by publicly having him dressed (giving him status in front of servants), giving him shoes and putting the family signet on his hand. The son's contribution to this is acceptance of his status as a beloved son - which is completely undeserved. Verse 24 translates with 'for this son of mine was dead and is alive again' in the NRSV, but apparently the word 'again' is not essential to the

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<sup>402</sup> cf. Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 59-60.

<sup>403</sup> Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 62.

translation. The son has been found alive for the very first time, accepting who and what he is. But the story does not end with the feast at this point.

When the older brother returns home from work and is told that the feast is in response to the homecoming and acceptance of his younger brother, he refuses to go in. At this stage the father figure has evolved to symbolise Jesus himself who was eating with sinners. The older brother refuses to take part. Following the sharing of property at the beginning of the story, the older brother legally owns everything left in the house. However, giving a celebratory banquet is within the rights of the father. Bailey assumes that the son is not pleased about the spending of money for the banquet without being consulted. By staying outside and not looking after the guests at the side of his father, the older brother publicly insults his father. In reaction, the father humiliates himself again by leaving his guests and joining his son outside to plead with him (παρεκάλει αὐτόν). Again, the father pays the price of reconciliation through humiliation. The older son insults him again by omitting a respectful title: he complains and claims 'I never disobeyed you.'<sup>404</sup> His words are in stark contrast to his actions. In contrast to his younger brother, he is a rebel without knowing it. His speech betrays a deep insecurity about himself and about his status: 'You have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.'<sup>405</sup> The father ignores all the insults, he only gently reminds his son that the prodigal is his own brother.

Jesus uses this parable to justify his actions; he clearly puts the Pharisees in the position of the older brother. Shockingly, the story has an open ending. Whereas

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<sup>404</sup> Lk 15:29

<sup>405</sup> Lk 15:29

the younger son has been found and is part of the feast, the older son is still outside at the end of the story.

The situation the older brother finds himself in may be even more demanding: by re-establishing the younger brother as a son, the father makes him an heir again, now entitled to a third of the (greatly diminished) family wealth. Reconciliation is costly; so far the father has paid the price by humiliating himself. However, another part of the price is to be paid by the older brother, sharing his part of the inheritance to enable the homecoming of the younger brother.<sup>406</sup> The father made this decision without consulting the older brother – the story is not finished until the older brother pays the price for reconciling his younger brother and accepts responsibility for his loss – precisely as in the previous two parables about the sheep and the coin. The focus of the atonement in the story is here: Jesus shows himself as the good shepherd, the good woman and the true older brother, who goes after his brother and is willing to pay the price for his re-institution.

#### **6.4.3.4 Theological Interpretation**

At the centre of the parable is the typological depiction of two very different attempts to find happiness: either through self-discovery or through moral conformity. The younger son depicts sin or being lost in a way everybody would recognise: he did something unthinkable in the historic context of the time and lost everything in the process. In contrast, the older brother thought he was obedient to the father (therefore to God) but the story revealed that they were both equally

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<sup>406</sup> cf. Keller, Timothy J., *The Prodigal God : Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), 26ff.

alienated from the father. The father had to leave the house for the younger and he had to leave the feast for the older brother: both needed to be found and in both cases this required humiliation on behalf of the father: this reconciliation was costly. At heart, the brothers are much more alike than it might appear. They both wanted the same: they wanted the family property without the father, and tried to control the outcome in two different ways: by open power play or by outward obedience. The moral observance of the older son was a result-orientated and calculated way to control his environment. Essentially, both brothers were alienated from their father's heart, but they expressed this differently: either by rebelliously breaking rules or by keeping them diligently, proudly and seemingly righteously. In their contrasting actions, both tried to be their own saviour. Interestingly, both sons betray their condition through lack of joy, which fits precisely the definition of sin by McFadyen.

Timothy Keller in his excellent short study of the parable sees the sin of the brothers in assuming a role that is not theirs:

Sin is not just breaking the rules, it is putting yourself in the place of God as Savior, Lord, and Judge just as each son sought to displace the authority of the father in his own life. [...] There are two ways to be your own Savior and Lord. One is by breaking all the moral laws and setting your own course, and one is by keeping all the moral laws and being very, very good.<sup>407</sup>

This may be true, but I would go further than this. Both brothers' actions stem from a misguided perception of who they are. The story culminates in telling both brothers who they really are: beloved sons, heirs, treasured offspring for whom the father is prepared to publicly humiliate himself. The younger son rebels against

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<sup>407</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 44.

his role which is perceived to be narrow, stifling, slavish, possibly suffocating under the authority of his father and his older brother. Similarly, the older brother 'works like a slave' 'for all these years'<sup>408</sup> without realising that he is not a slave: he is the beloved son (τέκνον). Recovery for both needs the father's initiative: he comes out of the house in both cases to tell them who they really are. Recovery for both requires allowing themselves to be found: accepting who they really are. There is however a difference between the two possible reactions to a misperception of oneself:

The younger son's flight from the father was crashingly obvious. He left the father literally, physically, and morally. Though the older son stayed at home, he was actually more distant and alienated from the father than his brother, because he was blind to his true condition. [...] Because the elder brother is more blind to what is going on, being an elder-brother Pharisee is a more spiritually desperate condition.<sup>409</sup>

Shockingly, whereas the salvation of the younger brother seems to be assured in the story, due to the open ending this is not so in the case of the older brother. As usual, Jesus connects more easily with the outcast: 'the tax collectors and the prostitutes enter the kingdom before you.'<sup>410</sup> Those who are aware of their condition are somewhat blessed since humility comes easier for them: 'For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.'<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Lk 15:29

<sup>409</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 47.

<sup>410</sup> Mt 21:31

<sup>411</sup> Ps 138:6

### **6.4.3.5 Actualisation**

The parable is strikingly analogous to the patterns of control and release found in addiction in response to shame. Jesus depicts two different ways of being lost: the younger son with his combination of short-sighted decisions ends up as a slave and the older son feels similarly enslaved in his seemingly contrasting way of life: to both the 'Lord's year of favour' is announced (Lk 4:18-22). By telling the story of two lost sons Jesus shows exemplarily and typologically how human life can fail if human beings lose the true understanding of who they are. It also acknowledges that human beings are vulnerable to losing their true self-perception. This is precisely the understanding of shame reached in the previous chapter. Both warnings and the appeal towards the Pharisees are applicable to every human being: the same ways in which to fail God's kingdom that Jesus depicts in his parable are as present now as in biblical times: they are part of the human condition.

In addition to describing how human beings can get lost through distorted perceptions of themselves it shows the way out: it shows what recovery looks like and it offers the opportunity to understand more fully the connection between sexuality, spirituality and recovery. It shows that the precondition for any recovery is the acceptance of a problem: older brothers do not know their own heart; therefore their condition is more serious. It is far more difficult to recognise the sin in the wrong motivation for moral behaviour than being confronted with obviously immoral behaviour as a sign for sin. Walter Lechler, one of the best known German addiction therapists has the famous motto: 'whom God loves he lets become an

alcoholic!’<sup>412</sup> The blessing of addicts is that they are bound to “hit bottom,” that they will be “beaten by the bottle.” It is easier for younger brothers than for older brothers to find a way to their hearts via their faults – their faults are obvious and have a tendency to become undeniable.

The parable suggests that true older brothers take responsibility for the lostness of younger brothers and offer their help in finding them. It shows that recovery needs others to affirm who one truly is, and recovery from shame needs others to heal the distorted self perception.

I am convinced that Jesus depicts in a typological way how human beings – being vulnerable to shame - can fail their life, how they can end up in slavery and miss the banquet. Patterns of control and release seem to work in exactly the same way as the two sons miss their true identity and become ensnared in different forms of idolatry and sin.

In spite of others having already compared this parable to addiction, the explanatory power of the parable is far greater than this. Not only does the parable describe the effects of shame and recovery from shame, but it also describes control and release, excessive appetites and deprivation behaviours, it has explanatory power towards sexual addiction in particular and towards the general human condition and the danger of getting lost in general. The brothers and the father are types applicable to the area of addiction, thus this parable offers more insight into sexual addiction than other passages that might outwardly deal with sexuality.

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<sup>412</sup> Lair, Jacqueline C. et al., *Von mir aus nennt es Wahnsinn : Protokoll einer Heilung* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1983), 230.



As always, correlation has its limitations. One could argue that the parable has nothing to do with sexuality or that the younger brother made free choices about his departure from the family. On the other hand, the parable has been identified as meaningful for those who suffer from sexual addiction and the suspicion of the older brother concerning the behaviour of the younger brother suggests this connection. Also, every addiction has an element of choice, particularly in the early stages of the condition. I would argue that the connection between bad decisions and the impairment of control is depicted by the parable very well indeed.

### 6.5 Outcomes

As mentioned before, the danger of any correlative approach is one of *eisegesis*. It might have been more impressive to start methodologically with the biblical text and then to follow the biblical interpretation with the exploration of sexual addiction. However, although this might have given the illusion of greater objectivity, it is more honest to acknowledge the starting point for the biblical interpretation as looking for biblical corroboration of a particular understanding of addiction and shame. *Exegesis* is always *eisegesis* to some extent; 'biblical scholars come to the text with just as many interpretative strategies and expectations as anyone else,' and 'integrity consists not of having no presuppositions but of being aware of what one's own presuppositions are and of the obligation to listen to and interact with those who have different ones.'<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 11.

One area which remains to be looked into is whether the theological and biblical exploration has anything to offer in addition to a purely secular understanding of sexual addiction.

As mentioned in the chapter about actualisation, the most obvious outcome is how closely the theological understanding correlates with the secular understanding and how it corroborates secular findings. However, the theological understanding emphasises different areas. I am aware that the biblical text is open to many different understandings: my interpretation and the following list of outcomes has to be fragmentary and can only offer examples.

A theological understanding of sexual addiction stresses that our faults are ways to explore our selves and constitute invitations to growth and holiness. It invites those with excessive appetites and those who suffer from self-righteousness to become 'poor in spirit' and to recognise each other as fellow sinners.

Understanding addiction theologically does not water down the addiction definition in such a way that everybody can be seen as an addict, but it invites us to view patterns of control and release as part of a greater whole, with addiction at one end of a spectrum rather than as a condition with perfectly clear boundaries. Theology offers the possibility of seeing shame as part of the human condition and addiction as one possible expression of this. However, the shared vulnerability to shame should offer non-addicts a pertinent point of connection with, and deepened understanding of, those suffering from addiction, suggesting a very convincing solidarity in sin. The biblical archetype showing control and release as seemingly different responses to the same malady encompasses both healthy and addicted individuals. Addiction is then portrayed as one particular and extreme

way of struggling with limited gifts and unlimited desire, a particular way of dealing with finitude triggered by a misconception of who one is.

Understanding addiction theologically means understanding it fundamentally as a spiritual malady requiring a spiritual solution. Hence this understanding has explanatory power as to why spirituality tends to play such a crucial role in recovery.

Taking the findings of secular addiction research seriously might offer theologians an insight into why biblical references to sexuality are so sparse and why one discovers ‘not so much a series of norms about sex, as a series of asides and a larger silence’.<sup>414</sup> Sexuality cannot be understood independently from other aspects of being human, in particular the human vulnerability towards shame. A purely moralistic and individualistic understanding of human sexuality is clearly inadequate; taking the secular findings seriously should result in the death of the “moral model”.

Additionally, theological discourse about human sexuality, for example about the legitimacy of homosexual relationships, seems to rely on very few biblical passages and on disagreement about how to interpret them and connect them to wider scripture. Seeing sexuality in the context of spirituality could potentially broaden the theological approach and offer a fresh insight into questions that seem to be treated purely from an angle of moral legitimacy. However, this would go beyond the scope of this exercise.

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<sup>414</sup> Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 44.

Practical Theology needs to have a 'view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.'<sup>415</sup> Hence, what remains is to explore whether the understanding of sexual addiction as one possible outcome of a shame distortion and its understanding as a spiritual malady in the sense of a wrong perception of self requiring redeeming humility (in the sense of a realistic sense of self), can help in finding more appropriate responses to shame in general and to sexual addiction in particular from the Christian community.

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<sup>415</sup> Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 25.

## 7 Ministerial Outcomes

### 7.1 Introduction

If shame is an outcome of the fall it is part of the church's calling of building for the kingdom<sup>416</sup> to counter its effects to minister to those suffering from it. The parable of the prodigal does not only suggest that true older brothers take responsibility for the lostness of younger brothers and offer their help in finding them, but makes it quite clear by its open ending that the healing and salvation of the older brother depends on his attitude towards his younger brother. The question of whether the church's ministry to those affected by toxic shame and reacting to this in various ways is indeed a 'faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God'<sup>417</sup> is therefore one of particular urgency.

In Christian understanding human beings deserve an enormous honour. They are made in the image of God and their creation was praised by God as 'very good'. Part of their vocation is the *dominium terrae* and according to St Paul we are called to be co-creators with God. The church is called to be a living sign of God's coming kingdom – proclaiming him, working towards his kingdom and living in anticipation of his kingdom.

One of the limits of this study is the difficulty of defining shame. Toxic shame has a tendency to be hidden and can only be deduced by its effects: any description is bound to be phenomenological. Following the exploration of shame in the context

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<sup>416</sup> cf. Wright, N. T., *Surprised by Hope : Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 218ff.

<sup>417</sup> Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 25.

of an Augustinian perspective on sin, I suggested a theological definition of shame: losing a realistic perception of oneself. As argued above, Original Sin describes the constitutional vulnerability of human beings to losing a realistic perception of themselves. If human beings are vulnerable to losing the sense of their honour and worth, they can be instrumental in causing others to lose their adequate self-perception. This is not only true for individuals, but for all human groups, societies and institutions. The church is no exception to this. Considering the central importance of shame suggested in previous chapters I shall first examine whether this understanding has anything new to offer for the church's ministry.

## **7.2 Shame and the Church**

A great deal could be written about Christianity and shame in general, and one could focus easily on various liturgical and ministerial practices and explore whether the centrality of shame should influence theory and practice. Every attempt to explore this has to be patchy and limited to giving examples. I start by summarising the more general work of Stephen Pattison and shall then more specifically look at shame, sexuality, the church and sexual addiction.

If shame is as significant as has been suggested above, it is part of the church's calling to be aware of its own shaming effect and its own use and abuse of shaming, and it is part of the church's ministry to work towards a reduction of toxic shame.

In the last part of his book about shame Pattison lists a large number of areas and cases where he sees the church involved in both abusing and increasing shame -

and he suggests ways in which these effects could at least be reduced.<sup>418</sup> As shame is a distorted perception of oneself, shamed people 'radically over- or underestimate their place in relationships and events.'<sup>419</sup> As their wounded self searches for external approval, these external events are given undue significance and tend to be misinterpreted. According to Pattison, inadequate human interaction due to shaming is not limited to individuals but is also institutionally present. Hence individuals and institutions may contribute to further shaming without any intention to do so:

There is no aspect of Christian thought or practice that might not engender or exacerbate shame in some individual or group. Shame is often an essentially unmanageable, uncontrollable and unpredictable accompaniment to symbols and actions that is not necessarily intended by their originators.<sup>420</sup>

A number of liturgical practices do not only 'build up the body of Christ and make manifest God's accepting love',<sup>421</sup> but communicate to people a 'sense of rejection, inferiority, unloveableness, powerlessness, worthlessness and defilement.'<sup>422</sup> As a prime example Pattison names the prayer of humble access, expressing human beings as unworthy to gather up the crumbs under God's table. Intended to communicate a sense of humility and awe in the presence of God (what Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*<sup>423</sup>), for somebody who is already shamed this prayer communicates an image of God that is contrary to a worthy and positive

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<sup>418</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 229-315.

<sup>419</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 128.

<sup>420</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 289.

<sup>421</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 258.

<sup>422</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 258.

<sup>423</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*.

self-understanding. There is a multitude of possible examples showing a language of power, domination, obedience, royalty and submission. These include a number of hymns that for somebody predisposed offer a damaging image of self. As one example for many can serve ‘Come down, O Love Divine’:

Let holy charity  
 Mine outward vesture be,  
 And lowliness become mine inner clothing:  
 True lowliness of heart,  
 Which takes the humbler part,  
 And o’er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

Pattison notices similar effects through child rearing and religious formation.

Greven<sup>424</sup> has pointed out that evangelical churches have been obsessed with authority, control and obedience for centuries and he sees a connection between this mindset and the physical punishment of children. Rubin<sup>425</sup> comes to an even more negative view in his two studies of protestant and pietistic spirituality, concluding that ‘many evangelical Christians today suffer from scrupulosity, depression, anxiety, and fear.’<sup>426</sup> Examples demonstrating shaming formation and theology can be found without difficulty in all traditions of Christianity – catholic guilt is a proverbial quality. There are few empirical studies exploring the relationship between shame and religion. Nelson Ould found a correlation between the presence of chronic shame and membership of conservative Calvinist churches

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<sup>424</sup> cf. Greven, Philip, *Spare the Child : the Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 69.

<sup>425</sup> Rubin, Julius H., *Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Rubin, Julius H., *The other Side of Joy : Religious Melancholy among the Bruderhof* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>426</sup> Rubin, *Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America*, 229.



in the USA.<sup>427</sup> Apparently chronically shamed Christians are drawn into conservative churches because 'they provide explicit values (and people embodying those values) in which a narcissistic sufferer may find merger with perfection.'<sup>428</sup> Christian moral teaching can be both idealistic and perfectionist (which is particularly true for conservative churches), and at the same time offers an understanding that human beings are too bad and weak to live according to these rules. Interestingly, moral teaching is often non-specific. Rites of confession are mostly not about particular and clearly defined areas of failure or fault, but about a general sinfulness and unworthiness. It is left to individual people to find out what their sins are. 'People are invited to feel bad before God, and then to work out what exactly has got them into this state of alienation.'<sup>429</sup> For scrupulous people this exacerbates their feeling of general unworthiness and defilement – enhancing a corrosive sense of shame rather than specific feelings of guilt (which also offer the opportunity to make amends). Christian morality seems – at least partly - to denigrate not only what people have done, but what they are.

Apart from these unintentional shaming effects of Christianity Pattison suggests three areas in which the church wittingly or unwittingly exploits shame: church discipline, recruitment and retention of church members and clergy.<sup>430</sup> Exclusion, formal or informal, is still common in many Christian churches. Many denominations react towards members who publicly fail to live up to their moral

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<sup>427</sup> Ould, Nelson E., 'Chronic Shame in Pastoral Theology : an American Protestant Reformed Perspective' (Thesis (Ph D), University of Edinburgh, 1995).

<sup>428</sup> Ould, 'Chronic Shame in Pastoral Theology', 108.

<sup>429</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 266.

<sup>430</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 277.

standards by excluding them (e.g. excommunication following divorce and remarriage in Roman Catholicism). These dynamics apply with much greater force to clergy. Clergy tend to be idealised and their livelihood depends on their being in good standing with their church institution. The current situation in the Church of England, where clergy are expected to be either celibate or married to a spouse of the opposite sex, places officially different standards of behaviour upon the clergy than upon the laity, for whom faithful and stable same sex relationships are tolerated. That the clerical standards are perceived and intended to be “higher” is telling indeed. The problem is that clergy get away with a lot of things if no scandal is caused, making appearance, preservation of face, honour and respect more important than guilt, repentance and forgiveness. This is further complicated by the fact that the official rules are in conflict with what large groups of church members consider to be thoroughly moral behaviour – for example faithful, monogamous, committed and stable homosexual relationships. This traps people in a system where honesty is punished, thus disabling people to live openly, morally and responsibly.<sup>431</sup>

Pattison concludes that shame is not confined to any particular church community, but is bound up in a complex network of circumstances, attitudes, beliefs and practices. Religion itself is often not the primary cause of shame, but offers itself to be used to support, legitimise and enhance shame. ‘For those trapped in shame-bound, shaming, abusive and neglectful families as children, Christianity has often contributed to their sense of being unable to escape from a sense of personal

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<sup>431</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 269.

abnegation and alienation.’<sup>432</sup> On the other hand, Christianity has been instrumental for many, addicts in particular, to develop a sense of worth and self-acceptance and to discover freedom. Recognising that the relationship between religion and mental health remains ambiguous, Pattison makes three suggestions of how to make it less so:

- the Christian community must become more critically aware of its own use and exploitation of shame.
- it is necessary for the religious community to undertake some de-idealisation of itself, its God, and its effects.
- the church should change or modify some of its practices.<sup>433</sup>

Pattison finishes by giving examples of how changes in certain areas could reduce the shaming effects of church practice: “hearing into speech” those who suffer from shame,<sup>434</sup> inclusive language, avoidance of notions of sacrifice and selflessness particularly in education,<sup>435</sup> training on and increased awareness of the effects of shame and developing liturgical and social ways of actively affirming individuals and groups.<sup>436</sup>

The most important point he makes seems to be that the Christian community needs to increase its awareness of how its social and liturgical practices and its use of scripture affect those who suffer from shame and how a positive effort can be

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<sup>432</sup> Pattison, *Shame*, 273.

<sup>433</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 276.

<sup>434</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 291.

<sup>435</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 294.

<sup>436</sup> cf. Pattison, *Shame*, 294.

made to counteract this. As an example Pattison suggests a much more sparing use of liturgical texts like the Prayer of Humble Access or a much more specific use of penitential liturgies, focusing on healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and making amends for specific wrongs. This is a huge field and, although I mostly agree with his analysis, I see the danger of returning to a casuistic approach towards sin, similar to the medieval confession books. I also disagree with his altogether negative view of practical attempts to induce humility.

As already mentioned above, shame is a distorted perception of self and recovery from this requires humility. The underlying difficulty seems to be how to counteract a wrong perception of self without shaming the person as a whole, how to confer true humility in the sense that human beings are limited and not God, but instead are called to find happiness in their acceptance of being referred to God. How can an adequate understanding of oneself in the order of creation be induced without adding further shame? The misleading focus of humility as primarily countering pride and not shame might be to some extent be owed to the lack of proper language. The difficulty of distinguishing healthy shame from toxic shame leads to the difficulty in communicating meaningfully the positive side of true humility. Pattison rightly notices that hymns, liturgies and theological writings about humility have the potential to shame those further who are predisposed in this way: language and spiritual practice about humility are easily both misunderstood and misused. In many churches and in wider society any reference to humility is shunned except in the most formal liturgical way – in the Church of England the language of the Book of Common Prayer and its constant reference to human sinfulness seems painfully out of place. The beauty of Cranmer's poetic liturgical language might result in protecting participants from the meaning of the

text. One of the challenges for Christian practice, recognising the widespread existence of toxic shame within the church community, seems to be the development of non-shaming (and counter-shaming!) language and practices of humility. If Christian communities would actively seek to diminish toxic shame and its effects, a necessary precondition would be to consciously adopt a similar attitude as twelve-step communities about their membership: nobody is ever excluded for whatever somebody has done or is still doing.

Christian practices that seem to be uniquely placed to counteract shame are easily misunderstood and abused to induce further shaming. Sacramental confession might serve as one example for many. The practice has declined dramatically in all churches offering this practice. Its reputation among many Christians is connected with penance, punishment, feeling bad about oneself or being told how bad and sinful one is. Most Christians of a reformed or Anglican background think of confession mostly in the context of its medieval abuse through fundraising. On the other hand, it is one of the most pertinent Christian practices for correcting negative self-image, for receiving feedback on whether one's specific actions were truly as negative as one perceives them, for offering a completely safe and confidential place to become vulnerable and open, for destroying the negative effects of a hidden double life and for receiving the assurance of divine forgiveness. I am not aware of any empirical data looking at the effects of confession on toxic shame, but I know a lot of people who make use of confession precisely to counteract their inner sense of shame, to deprive secrets of their power and to be reminded tangibly of the love of God.

Confession allows people to re-enact their shame, to objectify themselves, and to look at themselves dispassionately. Intensification of shame is one way of facing it. Pastoral workers can help by becoming informal and occasional confessors to shamed people who need the liberation of exposure.<sup>437</sup>

I would dare to suggest that this is one of the functions of counselling. Secular psychotherapy seems to become more and more popular and widely used whereas the practice of sacramental confession is dying out. Whilst the church neglects its treasures other people are playing with our toys.

What seems to be most pertinent in Pattison's analysis is that churches, particularly conservative communities, both attract shamed people and shame people. In stark contrast to the ministry of Jesus, churches do not seem to reach out primarily to the marginalised, the wounded and those in need of help. Keller puts it lucidly: 'If our churches aren't appealing to younger brothers, they must be more full of elder brothers than we'd like to think.'<sup>438</sup> By telling his three parables about being lost and found Jesus not only justified his own outreaching behaviour, but encouraged of his audience to do likewise. Those who are able to outwardly obey moral standards of behaviour depend for their spiritual wellbeing and recovery on reaching out to those who cannot. The older brother in the parable is neglecting his duties in not taking responsibility for the homecoming of the younger brother. Faithful practice for Christians would mean to actively seek out those who publicly fail the church's moral standards and to sacrificially work for their inclusion and well-being. Being interested in anybody but oneself seems to be

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<sup>437</sup> Lewis, *Shame*; Pattison, *Shame*, 206.

<sup>438</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 16.

an indicator of redemption: Younger brothers are too selfish and older brothers are too self-righteous to truly care for anybody else but themselves.

### 7.3 Sexuality and the Church

As chapter 5 and its summary of Christian teaching about human sexuality showed, the relationship between Christianity and sexuality is deeply ambivalent. Although marriage has been mostly affirmed as sacramental and is biblically equated with the relationship between Jesus and his church,<sup>439</sup> the identities of husband and wife have often been deliberately styled as anti-erotic, leaving marriage as a refuge to extinguish desire, not to celebrate it.<sup>440</sup> Christianity, though having adjusted and partly rejected the Hebrew purity rules,<sup>441</sup> it is a community which has used sexuality as a *cordon sanitaire* to define who is inside and who is outside, who is clean and who is unclean.<sup>442</sup> The anti-identity of the Christian ideal of the early church, the virgin martyr, is the sodomite;<sup>443</sup> early Christians used sexual ethics to set themselves apart from pagan society and for most of Christian history 'heresy implies sexual deviance and sexual deviance implies heresy.'<sup>444</sup> Christian communities have identified and policed their boundaries by shamefully excluding whole groups of people for ontological reasons, either totally or from specific

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<sup>439</sup> Eph 5:22-33

<sup>440</sup> 1 Cor 7:9

<sup>441</sup> cf. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*.

<sup>442</sup> cf. Malina, Bruce J., *The New Testament World : Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>443</sup> Jordan, Mark D., *Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>444</sup> Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 72.

functions such as full sacramental participation: e.g. homosexuals, divorcees or indeed women. In spite of the theoretical distinction between ontological identity and specific acts, Christian practices of shaming and exclusion of sexual deviants have often excluded whole groups of people for what they were rather than for what they did.

The importance of shame in the development of sexual addiction and the ongoing use of shame around sexual behaviour in the Christian church poses the pertinent question as to whether the ministerial practice of the church is indeed 'faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.'<sup>445</sup> As described earlier, sexual addiction and religious behaviour appear to be connected and can be part of an oscillating cycle of control and release.<sup>446</sup> Before looking more closely at ministerial suggestions in the area of sexual addiction, it might be helpful to look briefly at the more general connection between sexuality and spirituality.

#### 7.4 Sexuality and Spirituality

The predominantly negative connection between Christian spirituality and sexuality, viewing sexuality as something opposed to spiritual progress, is only part of the picture. Nietzsche's critique that 'Christianity gave Eros poison to drink – he did not die from it, but he did degenerate, into a vice',<sup>447</sup> is only true to some

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<sup>445</sup> Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 25.

<sup>446</sup> cf. Birchard, Thaddeus, 'Clergy Sexual Misconduct: Frequency and Causation,' *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 15 (2000); Birchard, 'The Snake and the Seraph.'; Birchard, 'Those Twin Levers that Move the World.'; Carnes et al., 'Bargains With Chaos.'

<sup>447</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 2. ed., vol. 5, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (München: dtv, 1988), 102.



extent. It is easy to find within Christianity an affirmative tradition, emphasising the goodness of sexuality as part of God's good creation and understanding 'sexuality as expressed in, and expressive of, spirituality.'<sup>448</sup> In his study comparing sexuality and spirituality Chris Cook concludes that:

sexuality and spirituality, far from being opposed to each other, are connected at many levels. Each has the capacity to evoke - or inhibit - the other.<sup>449</sup>

Cook specifies that both spirituality and sexuality seem to be universal aspects of being human, are about relationship and involve nakedness with another, have something to do with sameness and otherness, involve fear, awe and attraction, may be developed on physical, psychological and spiritual levels, are concerned with our deepest desires and to some extent defy adequate verbal expression.<sup>450</sup> The proponents of "neurotheology" suggest that this connection is present on a neurobiological level.<sup>451</sup>

Walter Schubart writes in 1941 that 'the religious and the sexual are the strongest forces of life. Who assumes that they are original opponents teaches the disunion of the soul. Who turns them into enemies rips apart the human heart.'<sup>452</sup> The most outspoken connection between Christian spirituality and sexuality is encountered

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<sup>448</sup> Cook, Christopher C. H., 'Sexuality and Spirituality,' in *Sexual Issues : Understanding and Advising in a Christian Context*, ed. Joanne Marie Greer and Brendan Geary (Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew, 2010), 396.

<sup>449</sup> Cook, 'Sexuality and Spirituality,' 406.

<sup>450</sup> cf. Cook, 'Sexuality and Spirituality,' 405-06.

<sup>451</sup> cf. Newberg, Andrew B. et al., *Why God Won't Go Away : Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001); Newberg, Andrew B. and Mark Robert Waldman, *Born to Believe : God, Science, and the Origin of Ordinary and Extraordinary Beliefs* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007); Newberg, Andrew B. and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes your Brain : Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

<sup>452</sup> Schubart, Walter, *Religion und Eros*, 27. - 29. Tsd. ed. (München: Beck, 2001), 7.

in the mystic tradition. Mystic experience is soaked with eroticism and resorts to erotic language to describe religious experience. Although less obvious than in other religious traditions like Hinduism, sexuality has been described within the Christian tradition as an 'occurrence of the Holy'<sup>453</sup> and as the 'underlying source of spirituality.'<sup>454</sup> As one of example of many, Julian of Norwich writes:

So I understood that our sensuality is founded in nature, in mercy, and in grace, and this foundation enables us to receive gifts which lead us to endless life. For I saw very surely that our substance is in God, and I also saw that God is in our sensuality, for in the same instant and place in which our soul is made sensual, in that same instant and place exists the city of God, ordained from him without beginning. He comes into this city and will never depart from it, for God is never out of the soul, in which he will dwell blessedly without end.<sup>455</sup>

The connection of sexuality and spirituality has triggered a lot of interest in the past years:

Whoever separates Eros and religion and sows enmity between them creates a conflict between love for man and love for God. When Eros and religion exclude each other, Eros becomes vulgar and religion frigid.<sup>456</sup>

As sexual addiction and an unhealthy form of religious behaviour can be connected in such a way that they arrest and energise each other, a healthy sexuality and a

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<sup>453</sup> Eliade, Mircea and Theodor Sapper, *Ewige Bilder und Sinnbilder : vom unvergänglichen menschlichen Seelenraum* (Olten: Walter, 1958), 15.

<sup>454</sup> Grün, Anselm, *Intimität und zölibatäres Leben : Erfahrungsberichte von Priestern und Ordensleuten*, 2. ed. (Würzburg: Echter, 1996), 21. Cf. Müller, Wunibald, *Ekstase : Sexualität und Spiritualität*, 3. ed. (Mainz: Grünewald, 1999); Müller, Wunibald, *Küssen ist Beten : Sexualität als Quelle der Spiritualität* (Mainz: Grünewald, 2003).

<sup>455</sup> Julian, of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 287.

<sup>456</sup> Goldbrunner, Josef, *Realization : Anthropology of Pastoral Care*, trans. Paul C. Bailey and Elisabeth Reinecke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 109. Examples of books dealing with the area are: Carr, David McLain, *The Erotic Word : Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Müller, Wunibald, *Intimität : vom Reichtum ganzheitlicher Begegnung*, 4. ed. (Mainz: Grünewald, 1997); Müller, *Ekstase*; Müller, *Küssen ist Beten*; Schubart, *Religion und Eros*.

healthy spirituality can influence and support one other. Obviously, sexuality in this sense is not restricted to its genital expressions but refers to a much wider self-experience and self-expression as sexual beings. Similarly, spirituality has been equally broadly defined as 'the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.'<sup>457</sup>

Apart from the mystic Christian tradition, the connection between sexuality and spirituality is particularly expressed in visual art and poetry. Heinrich Heine writes in his Songs to Seraphine:

The holy God dwells in the light,

As in the dark abysses.

For God is everything that is:

His breath is in our kisses.<sup>458</sup>

Bernini's sculpture Theresa in Ecstasy is well known and has been frequently used as an example for the similarity of sexual and spiritual experience. Even more obviously religious and erotic and only recently "discovered" is his little sculpture "Charity" in the Cappella de Sylva in Sant'Isidoro in Rome: until its restoration in 2002 the statue had been covered by a bronze corset for 139 years.

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<sup>457</sup> Schneiders, Sandra Marie, 'Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum,' *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3, no. 2 (2003), 166.

<sup>458</sup> 'Heinrich Heine's Poems: Songs to Seraphine', <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/49909/> (27 November 2010). The translation is a bit too free: the German says 'er ist in unsern Küssen'.

Figure 10 Gian Lorenzo Bernini: Charity



In an incarnational religion nothing created can be non-spiritual. *Natura pura* does not exist.<sup>459</sup> Like any other spiritual discipline, sexuality can progress, can deepen and further our spiritual life and our connection with God, ourselves and other human beings or can become a stumbling block or something destructive.

In the remaining part of this work I will focus on exploring whether the understanding of sexual addiction as an outcome of shame distortion challenges practices and responses from the Christian community and suggests more

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<sup>459</sup> cf. Kilby, Karen, *Karl Rahner : Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Rahner, Karl, 'Zum Verhältnis zwischen Theologie und heutigen Wissenschaften,' in *Schriften zur Theologie Bd. 10, Zum Verhältnis zwischen Theologie und heutigen Wissenschaften* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1972); Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens*.

appropriate and more 'faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.'<sup>460</sup>

## **7.5 Sexual Addiction and a faithful Christian Response**

This chapter can offer only general ideas – a lot more could be said about implications for specific areas; e.g. clergy training, hospital and mental health chaplaincy, hospitality to recovery groups, attitudes towards the behaviour of church membership, protection of children and vulnerable adults, or development of awareness within the church community. Even by limiting the focus to faithful Christian practice and sexual addiction the results have to be fragmentary. I suggest three main practical challenges resulting from the above discussion in addition to the more general suggestions about shame previously mentioned:

- The condition of sexual addiction needs to be taken seriously.
- It is ministerially unfaithful to consider it from a purely moralistic perspective.
- The promise of Jesus implicit in his parable could become a reality for the church: if the salvation of the older brother depends on his attitude towards his younger brother, the sacrificial engagement of older brothers (of whom the church is apparently full) with younger brothers (who are often excluded) is an urgent necessity. This would have particular consequences

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<sup>460</sup> Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 25.

for those trapped in oscillating cycles of control and release – often involving religious behaviour. Sex addicts may be a blessing for the church.

#### **7.5.1 Sexual Addiction is real and it matters**

The most important ministerial implication of the secular data about sexual addiction should be to take it seriously and not to purport that this issue only affects a tiny minority. There is a strong tendency in all churches to pretend that sexuality is either unproblematic or constitutes only a problem for a small minority – possibly outside the church. Hidden under the pretext that this is a private, personal and intimate matter (which of course it is) is a culture of silence and institutional inattention around any sexual issues. The recent scandals about clergy and child abuse had the effect of shaking some of those presumptions, but it made the issue also more frightening – and allowed the majority to make it the problem of some others from whom the church needs protection. The ongoing obsession of the general public with sexual misconduct and the exclusion of sexual sinners from society and church clearly serve the function to exculpate the “moral majority”.

The data about sexual addiction suggest that this perception is dangerously wrong: Sexual addiction is more widespread than is generally assumed and approximately 3% to 6% of the population are affected by it.<sup>461</sup>

For most healthy people sexuality is an aspect of being human which presents difficulties. For almost everybody sexuality is at least partly not a matter of choice

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<sup>461</sup> cf. Carnes, *Don't Call it Love*; Coleman, 'Is your Patient Suffering from Compulsive Sexual Behavior?.'

or voluntary adherence to a moral principle, but one of the most vulnerable areas of human life, often functioning as an indicator for some other area of their life being out of balance. For both addicts as well as non-addicts sexuality cannot be seen as an independent issue. To pretend that it is possible to speak about human sexuality purely in terms of individual morality, lifestyle and choice is dangerously misguided.

This is an issue for all of society (and not only for a tiny minority), but it is of particular importance to the churches: The number of clergy affected by sexual problems is much higher than in other professions. This became apparent in the debate about sexual abuse (which is distinct from sexual addiction) that ‘clergy exploit their parishioners at twice the rate of secular therapists.’<sup>462</sup> The denial that human sexuality is problematic enhances institutional inattention and prevents the protection of vulnerable people.

Those addicted to sex have a potentially lethal condition: among many possible consequences of their behaviour they may face loss of income and employment, criminal charges, destruction of families and relationships, sexual violence and abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and suicide (rates of which are very high among all addicts). Sexual addiction deeply affects anybody who comes into contact with it: addicts are emotionally absent, they lose an increasing amount of time to pursue their addiction and they are bound to live double lives, most of them being unable to be honest about the manner and the extent of their acting

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<sup>462</sup> *Time for Action : Sexual Abuse, the Churches and a New Dawn for Survivors : the Report to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland of the Group Established to Examine Issues of Sexual Abuse*, (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2002), 83.

out. Many addicts - though possibly not abusive in a criminal way – are predatory and abusive in their sexual lifestyles.

This list could be a lot longer, but the pretence that the vast majority of people live according to high moral standards (however liberal or conservative those may be) shames those who struggle and prevents the acceptance of fallible human beings as beloved people of God. The culture of silence, shame and neglect needs to be replaced by an honest appreciation that human sexuality has a dark side, is a particular vulnerable part of everybody's existence and needs to be taken seriously. A church seriously committed to reducing shame and building for God's kingdom would first make efforts to turn itself into a safe place for everybody: accepting human beings as fallible and resisting exclusion for whatever reason. It is impossible in ministerial practice to identify sexual addiction or to distinguish it from other sexual difficulties. However, this would be unnecessary and is not the task of ministry but of health care professionals. Currently churches are not safe and inviting places to admit sexual difficulties and confusions of any kind. The illusion maintained is that everybody is fine and that morally blameless behaviour is a matter of pure choice.

Apart from honestly recognising the difficulties and dangers of human sexuality, the prevalent culture of silence and shame prevents the church from speaking positively about sexuality, its power of connecting people, of fostering relationships, of its relation to spirituality. Not for nothing does the Bible begin with two people naked in a garden and finish with a wedding. Part of the reasons given as to why the clergy struggle with sexuality to a greater extent than people in



other professions is an 'absence of adequate theology of sexuality.'<sup>463</sup> The shameful silence about sexuality and the inability to accept that people can fail sexually seems to be connected to the inability to praise the beauty and spiritual value of human sexuality. A theological practice that would recognise the power of human sexuality positively and negatively and would create space in training, supervision and pastoral practice to acknowledge and address these issues would be immensely helpful in healing shame. Of all places, churches should enable people to speak about their struggles, their vulnerability and their failures. It is high time to recognise that failing sexually is extremely common, that churches could be instrumental in healing shame (through friendship, circles of accountability, rituals of penitence like confession and generally in fostering spirituality). There is every reason to challenge the culture of sexual fear with a healthy confidence: addicts recover through spirituality and the church is uniquely placed to offer faithful ministry, both for the sake of addicts and for its own sake. The healing of older brothers depends on their attitude to younger brothers.

#### **7.5.2 Sexual Addiction is not about Morality**

As with alcoholism several decades ago, it is time to bury the moral model. The standard reaction of the religious right against the recognition of the concept of sexual addiction is the suspicion that it could be used to justify or excuse adultery or to change the church's moral standard of what is acceptable human sexual behaviour. Hence most publications from this end of the spectrum denounce the

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<sup>463</sup> *Time for Action : Sexual Abuse, the Churches and a New Dawn for Survivors : the Report to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland of the Group Established to Examine Issues of Sexual Abuse*, 99.

concept altogether and stress the importance of choice, morality and the ready availability of God's grace to live according to their standards. Alternatively, some authors embrace the concept of sex addiction wholeheartedly to denounce in turn all sexual behaviour outside heterosexual marriage as being suspicious of sexual addiction – homosexuality in particular.<sup>464</sup> In a recent discussion on Premier Christian Radio about the prominent case of Tiger Woods seeking treatment for sexual addiction all comments from callers fell into those two categories.

This is not an issue of solely individual morality and choice. One of the defining criteria of sexual addiction is that people act against their moral standards. Their problem is not solved by the application of harsh moral standards or by a more liberal moral approach. However, considering the unique role of shame in the aetiology of sexual addiction and the further intense feelings of shame that acting out causes for the addict, a moralistic approach that increases feelings of shame and enhances the pressure for silence and secrecy is detrimental (though it apparently attracts “older brothers”). As stated above, the honest recognition that sexuality is one of the most vulnerable and difficult areas of human life where everybody is prone to struggle would create space to break through shame and silence and the horror of double lives.

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<sup>464</sup> Typical examples are Schaumburg, *False Intimacy*; Willingham, Russell, *Breaking Free : Understanding Sexual Addiction & the Healing Power of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

**7.5.3 Recovering Sex Addicts – a Blessing for Society and Church?**

If sex addicts face their condition, this leads them not only to withdraw from their particular compulsive behaviour, but to enter the long and painful journey of recovery from shame. Sex addicts do not have the luxury to ignore their weaknesses, but need to deal with them – otherwise they relapse and possibly die. This is their blessing: if they want to maintain their sobriety they have to make use of the path to growth and holiness that their condition offers them. Most 12-step fellowships for recovering sex addicts leave the definition of sobriety to the addict and their sponsor, but for those who have been recovering for a longer period of time some common features become apparent: For all of them recovery means that genital sexuality has to become optional and has to develop into a means of enhancing intimacy. For some, this means to live without genital sexuality – but they would claim that their sexuality has been vastly developed and enhanced in recovery, to say nothing of all of the other areas of their lives. Jean V. puts it clearly:

Throughout, my Twelve Step recovery network – both friends and groups – has given me support while Twelve Step principles have kept me focussed on the journey of personal healing and growth to which we addicts are uniquely privileged. [...] Long ago I was preoccupied with what I had to give up in recovery. Gradually I became aware of what I was receiving in recovery. My energy has progressively shifted toward personal growth with its tremendous rewards. Recovery – broadly defined as personal healing and integration – has become increasingly exhilarating and pursuit of this quest is one of life's greatest joys.<sup>465</sup>

Those who struggle with sexual addiction and have progressed on the long journey of recovery are worth listening to – for church and society. Struggling with sexuality is a human phenomenon not reserved to sex addicts. Those who have

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<sup>465</sup> V., *Sexuality in Perspective*, 192.

been forced by their addiction to walk the way from shame to grace by dealing with their wounds in a much deeper and diligent way than anybody not affected by this condition, could become ‘wounded healers’ for others: by engaging with them older brothers could access their shame. Recovered addicts offer a different perspective on questions of “sexual morality” and could be a visible sign that our weaknesses and our wounds can be our gifts and our talents at the same time.

## 7.6 Epilogue

Many sex addicts who enter recovery programs or therapy carry religious scars. Religious practice for many has offered the hope of controlling their condition, but instead they have encountered older brothers who had nothing to offer. Many became trapped in a cycle of control and release involving religious behaviour – attempting to deal with their shame by meandering along the paths of both the older and the younger brother.

Addicts offer hope to the church – both to older and younger brothers – potentially enabling the church to do God’s work more faithfully and to become a channel of his Holy Spirit:

‘Anoint and cheer our soiled face

With the abundance of thy grace!’<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Veni, Creator Spiritus, trans. John Cosin, 1627, ‘Oremus Hymnal: Come Holy Ghost, our Souls Inspire’, <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/c/c203.html> (27 November 2010).

## 8 Appendix: Billy Idol, Prodigal Son, Lyrics

Riding my life  
Like a run-a-way train  
Moving from  
One track to that  
Howling, crying,  
Screaming at the moon  
Only my voice came back  
Only the echo came back  
  
When I was a boy  
Daddy told me  
Grow tall  
Yes and Billy don't crawl  
Taught me how to ride  
Set me out on my own  
And I never came back  
  
And yes I'd do it again  
Oh wouldn't you  
Yeah I'd do it again  
A-huh oh yeah  
Do it again  
Baby  
Wouldn't you?

Remember  
When I lied  
Just when you  
Needed me  
Now I sit  
Alone and cry  
Cos now I believe in mercy  
Remember when I lied  
Just when you needed me baby  
I believe in mercy  
Riding, walking  
Looking so cool  
Guess I crossed  
Over the borderline  
Treated like a dunce  
Who just can't read  
Did I fool me too?  
And yes I'd do it again  
Oh wouldn't you  
Yes I'd do it again  
Aha yeah I'd do it again  
Baby  
Wouldn't you

Remember  
When I lied  
Just when you  
Needed me  
Now I sit  
Alone and cry  
Cos now I believe in mercy  
Remember when I lied  
Now that you  
Needed me  
Yes I believe in mercy  
I said "Come here"  
Look into my face  
And hear into my heart  
Hesitation  
Could re-arrange  
The other side  
To your love  
Take hold now baby  
And take  
What other  
Lovers have not  
Times is changing  
Will they re-arrange  
The other side to your love

No-woah woah woah

Yeah

Wooooo

(Come home

Here he is impatient one

Come home

Come home

Tell the story)

Come home

Here he is

The impatient one

Come home

To claim a glory

Prodigal son

Come home

Prodigal bum

Come home

Prodigal son

Prodigal son

Come home

To claim a glory

Prodigal son

Come home

Prodigal son

Come home



Prodigal bum

Here he comes

Yeah that prodigal son

Ooooh

He's the one

To tell his story

C'mon to tell his story

Tell his story

To claim his glory

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